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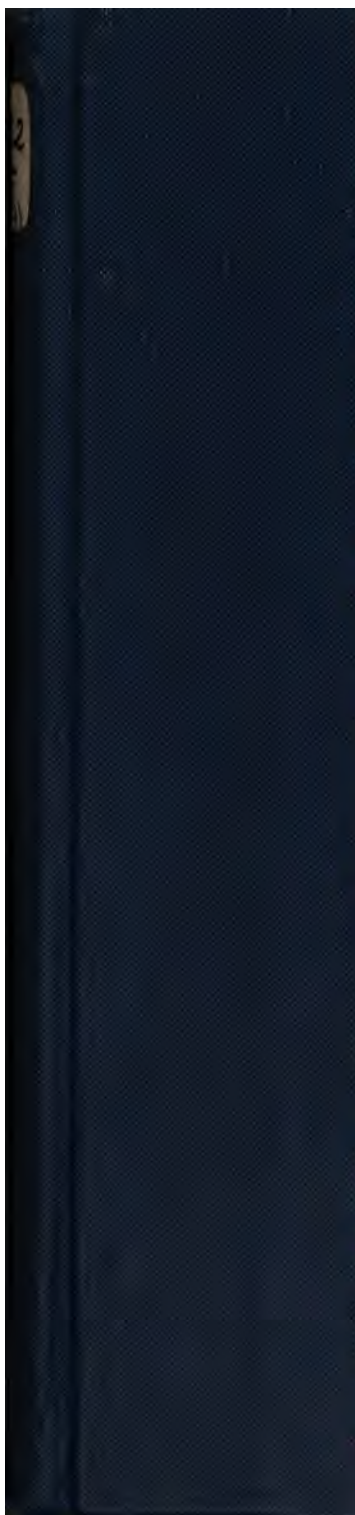
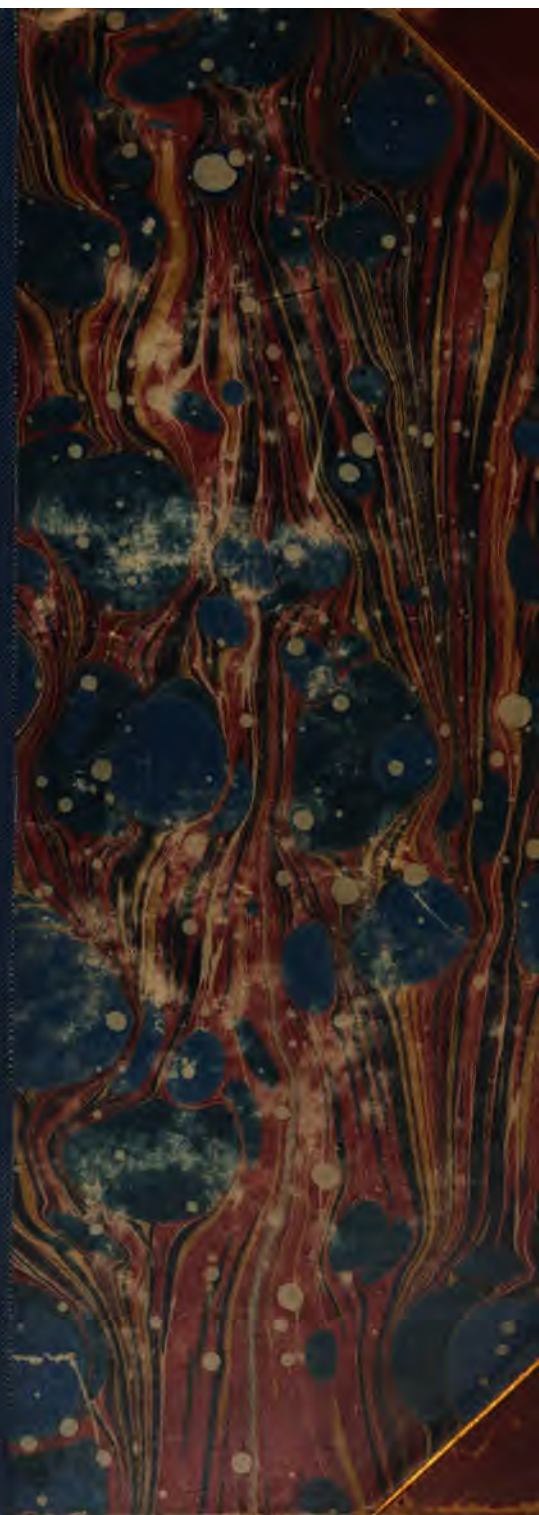
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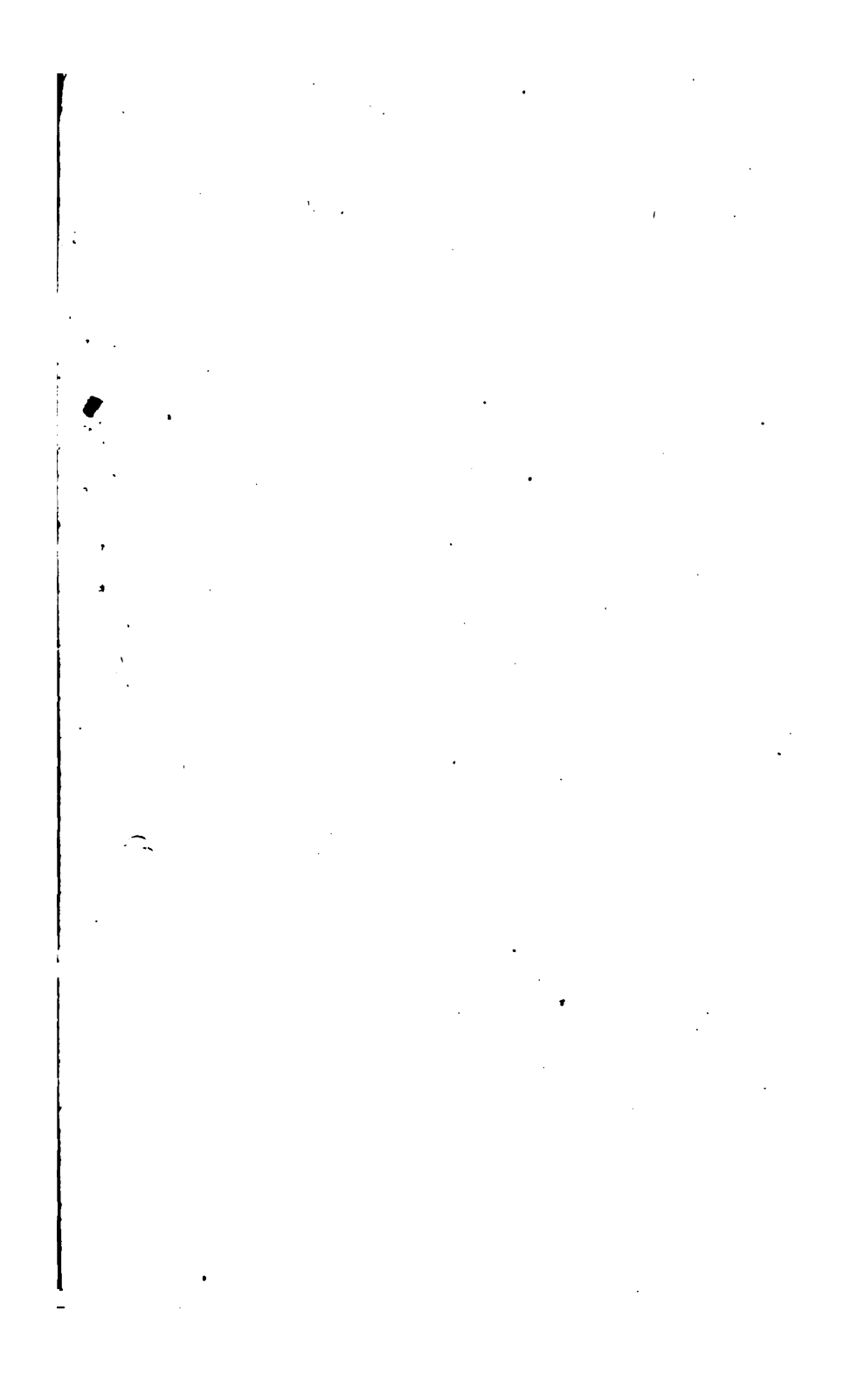


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MEN OF CAPITAL. //

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF

"THE BANKER'S WIFE," "PEERS AND PARVENUS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.
// 3 //

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,

GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1846.

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(101)

21482.14.5



Shapleigh fund

Frederick Shoberl, Junior, Printer to His Royal Highness Prince Albert,
51, Rupert Street, Haymarket, London.

THE
MAN OF CAPITAL;
OR,
OLD FAMILIES AND NEW.

CHAPTER XV.

O thou, the earthly author of my blood,
Whose youthful spirit, in me regenerate,
Doth with a twofold vigour lift me up
To reach at victory above my head,—
Grant proof unto my armour with thy prayers,
And with thy blessing steel my lance's point!

SHAKSPEARE.

Proud and happy, meanwhile, was the elder Mordaunt, in the conviction that his sapling was striking firm root in the ground. All was well with Deasmarsh. He had no fear for the future, and little regret for the past: so impossible did it appear to his sturdy nature and well-regulated mind but that the flighty prepossessions of his son must give

way under the influence of the duties he was so earnestly embracing, and the valuable intimacies he was forming in town. Sir John Grovynor Grovynor had marked his respect for the benefactor of his county by introducing Reresby to the political leaders of his party; and each of the young man's succeeding letters brought accounts of pleasant dinner parties, which had laid the foundation of others promising to be equally pleasant.

"He will do, my dear sir—he will do. Not a soul with whom he makes acquaintance but speaks well of him!" was his account of the new member to Jacob Cromer, as they ambled home together, side by side, one day, from the Quarter Sessions. And Jacob, who had been receiving a hint that very morning (such as he received only too often), of the discreditable life led at Cambridge by his nephews, whom the penurious policy of the Squire had placed in one of the minor colleges to be out of the way of temptation,

could scarcely repress a sigh while reflecting in how many ways the representatives of Deasmarsh had the advantage over the representatives of poor old Cromer Hall.

“And my boy, Tom,” added the exulting father, “whom I have scarcely seen this winter (for he has been spending his vacation at Burtsmill with my friends the Freshleys), appears to have returned to college with fresh ardour; for, I am told by his tutor, to prepare for an honour.”

Again, the Rector breathed hard and looked sorrowful. It seemed almost like partiality in the dispensations of Providence! Here was this prosperous son of trade, whose daughter was wooed by the only son of the wealthiest nobleman in the shire, and whose sons remained steadfast in the sunshine of life; while at the Hall, the only surviving daughter was wasting to a shadow under the influence of some secret sorrow; and the sons prematurely disgraced by riot and intemperance. Even

in his own peaceful rectory, the linnet, once so cheerful in its nest, was drooping, and had ceased to sing.

It required the exercise of all the good Rector's humble piety not to feel that the new man was receiving a somewhat overcharged measure of the good things of this world.

"I never seemed to feel till *now*," observed Mordaunt, in the unconscious egotism of paternal satisfaction, "that there was worth or stability in prosperity. But I cannot deny that the accounts I receive on all sides of my sons *have* a little inflated my pride. I had no right to count on Reresby's turning out as he has done! To have *him* work out the mine over which I have been so long brooding, is a fiftyfold greater triumph than undertaking it myself. Reresby is young—Reresby is eloquent—Reresby is a child of the century—Reresby has enjoyed a very different education from what fell to *my* share; nay, a more complete one than is be-

stowed on one in a thousand of men of his own condition of life. And to look forward to his distinguishing himself in the accomplishment of measures, the carrying of which, even without his having a hand in the business, will go so far to smooth the pillow of one's deathbed, by feeling how much the condition of humanity has been improved in one's time,—seems to put young blood into my veins !”—

“I am accused, I fancy,” silently mused the Rector (when the ruts and grips of a cross-road became fatal to the oratory of his companion), “of being sometimes tedious in the pulpit. But how often—how *very* often—does poor Mordaunt try my patience by his unreasonable panegyrics !—One could almost think he had heard of Stephen's rustication !”—

“Reresby is to make his maiden speech on Thursday se'nnight,” resumed his companion, as soon as they got once more on level ground, “on Sir John Grovynor Grovynor's

motion to inquire into the sanatory system of our penitentiaries."

"I fancied you were not anxious that he should speak this session?" observed Jacob.

"Far from it!—But there is no standing out against the overtures he has received. The question was originally suggested, at Deasmarsh, to the consideration of Sir John; and he insists on being seconded by my son."—

"In short, my dear sir, the question is your own property;" observed the rector, "to be argued with *your* arguments, and supported by data of your furnishing!"

"No, no!—Hang it, let the young fellow enjoy the credit to which he is entitled!" cried Mordaunt. "As well say that the summing up of a judge derives its merit from the testimony of the witnesses!"

"No fear but that Mr. Reresby will win golden opinions for himself!" replied the Rector, in a depressed voice.—"He has too many

advantages on his side for the world to deal with him churlishly.”—

A prophecy which, in the sequel, fully accredited the foresight of poor Jacob. The début of the member for Castle Dangan, in political life, was io-pæaned by the press, as though a Daniel were come to judgment!—A champion of the popular party, but standing in the House on independent grounds, a dispenser rather than a coveter of the good things of this world, what fear of the mustering of his partizans! So fond, moreover, is the London world of “sensations,” that it would have been indignant had any one pretended to doubt the assertion of those irrefragable oracles the newspapers, that a *rara avis* had broken its egg-shell.

“Remember, I was the first to prophecy that laurels were waiting for you, ready wreathed!”—said the Countess of Belvedere, addressing him with her blindest of smiles from her carriage, which she stopped in

Grosvenor Place for the purpose; "and you are bound to reward my foresight by fixing an early day to dine with me. Such of my friends as are aware of my happiness in being acquainted with the new Phoenix, are tormenting me for the favour of an introduction."—

The smiles of the beautiful widow being as broad as her compliments, Reresby made an effort to look grateful.

"But there is another event," she resumed, "of which I am equally anxious to learn the date. When are you likely to speak again? Lord Fauconberg has set his heart upon being in the House!"

And *this* time, there needed *no* effort to appear gratified. Reresby was fully aware that to the modern aspirant after celebrity it is scarcely less important to secure the penny trumpet renown of the coteries, than the sackbuts and psalteries of the press; and that, as far as extended the hollow echoes of the clubs, the praise of Lord Fauconberg was fame.

“ My ladyship waits for an answer,” resumed the fair flatterer, perceiving that she had hit her mark.

“ And my answer is,” replied Mordaunt, “ that I shall *never* speak again. Compliments from such a source have converted me at once into a ‘ Single-speech Mordaunt !’ I consider myself a made man for at least half a dozen sessions.”—

“ The fumes of the intoxicating draught of fame have not yet mounted into your head,” rejoined Lady Belvedere with a smile. “ But if you will dine with me on Saturday, we will fight out the argument of ‘ To speak or not to speak,’ before an audience less impatient than my coachman and horses.”

The proposition having been gratefully accepted, away went the barouche and its giddy occupant, laughing in her sleeve at having so easily found means to enliven with peacock’s feathers the jackdaw’s sober suit.

For Lady Belvedere, though—thanks to her

personal charms and the independent position which enabled her to render her house in Belgrave Square one of the most agreeable resorts in town—she enjoyed the friendship or rather the intimacy of many of the most eminent men of the day, was so little worthy the distinction, as to regard the enlistment in her circle of the greatest spirits of the time, precisely in the same light as she would have regarded the acquisition of a costly piece of furniture, or a Paris pendule. Delighting in display, delighting in having it said that her house was one of the most charming in the world, she made little distinction between the novelties furnished by Howell and James, and the novelties furnished by the House of Commons. Even Lord Fauconberg was prized only because he was universally said to be “the most rising man of the day.”

Her beauty and rich jointure, however, bespoke forgiveness for her levity of character.

The Countess was a person who, enthroned by authority of the elective monarchy of fashion, it was essential to please.—Aware that their tenure of her favour depended solely on her most capricious caprice, the brilliant birds of her aviary vied with each other in contending for preference by fluttering their gaudy wings, or tuning their garrulous throats; and the brocade and or-molu of Belgravia for once acquired a charm beyond its superficial splendours, from the delusions of more than one gifted mind in mistaking for sunshine the glare of a solar lamp.

Nothing could be better founded than the anxiety entertained by Sir Herbert Glynne on seeing one so genuine as his friend Reresby about to enter the gardens of Armida.—Forewarned by early experience of the heartless vanity of his fair cousin, he could not bear to see, for the hundredth time, the lambent flame of wit converted into squibs and crackers; or a crystal stream diverted from every useful

purpose, to become the ornamental fountain of her gay parterres.

Aware, on the other hand, that he should meet with angry opposition from his friend to their growing intimacy, Reresby said not a word of his engagement in Belgrave Square ; but, secretly convinced of Lady Belvedere's desire to become the Aspasia of the new Pericles, buckled on in self-defence an armour of philosophy calculated to defy her seductions.

Prepared to find himself the centre of attraction to a brilliant party, and having entered the gorgeous mansion of the Countess with an air of modest deprecation, he was a little surprised,—perhaps a little indignant,—at the well-bred coolness of his reception.—Neither Park nor Tower guns were fired in his honour !—Lady Belvedere, who was busily occupied with the ears of her Spitz dog, and the rich bracelets which, by caressing them, she was enabled to display, scarcely raised

her eyes to his while receiving his salutations.

The only persons present to witness his mortification were two very withered specimens of ancient history, who sat engulfed in two of the Countess's roomiest *fauteuils*, and whom, too new to London life to recognise as the oldest poet and most venerable historian extant, he conceived to be family connections; for nothing but prospects of inheritance he fancied could have recommended those bald heads to the favour of the fashionable widow. Before *such* uncles, however, he could readily believe that too warm a welcome to an N. N., like himself, might be imprudent.

Long, however, before the party was completed by the arrival of the eight additional guests constituting the dozen to which the talk-loving Lady Belvedere limited her banquets, Reresby began to feel that he was a *very* small fraction of the whole.—Instead of being invited, as announced to him, to dazzle

the eyes of an admiring company, he saw that he was there on probation, to be as severely scrutinized and implacably judged as is usually the case where a youthful pretender is paraded in presence of the conscript fathers.

“ Instead of being all tongue, as they expect, I find I must be all ear ! ” — was his judicious preparation for the ordeal.—“ Far safer to be voted heavy, than flippant.”

And by studiously concluding the few observations he hazarded with a note of interrogation, and listening with an air of respectful edification to twaddle that would scarcely pass current in the dullest periodical going, he contrived, in the course of dinner, to vanquish the mistrust of the critical synod. Those who came prepared to talk him down, relented.—The moment they saw him disposed to adopt their opinions, he was allowed to have one of his own.

The first he was induced to form, under these extenuating circumstances, was that

the charm of Lady Belvedere's clique was somewhat overrated. Her collection included, indeed, several very choice specimens of old china, and fine productions of the ancient masters. But, though the wit of the aged poet and political economy of the venerable politician were as racy in their way as wine of Comet growth, Reresby could not help feeling that both were the High Priests of an exploded creed; or casting repining glances at the corner of the table next the lovely hostess occupied by Lord Fauconberg, where easier and far pleasanter chat was carrying on.

The words of his rival, indeed, did not reach the ear of the tantalized Mordaunt.—But by the rejoinders, which the shriller voice of Lady Belvedere occasionally rendered audible, and still more, by the eloquent expression of her intelligent countenance, he was enabled to judge of the playful and fluent brilliancy of their conversation. To be ad-

mitted as a third into their colloquy, was the great object of his ambition. But he might as well have pretended to cap Turkish verses with the Sultan ;—the intrusion of a stranger being the signal for self-dependent men, like Fauconberg, to “ shut up shop.” Among the privileged, no one more unassuming. But even the homage of a man unknown to the world he lived in, endowed him with the hauteur of a grandee of Spain.

Had the demands on Reresby’s attention made by the discussers of great questions around him, necessitated less than the utmost exercise of his faculties, the novice might naturally have wondered at finding Lord Fauconberg included in such a party of gray-beards ; for how was he to surmise that these notabilities were merely dust thrown in the eyes of Lord Fauconberg’s iron-minded father ; who, but that he had the appearance of forming one of a political and literary junta, would have opposed an effective veto

to his intimacy with the dangerous Lady Belvedere !—

For if unexceptionable in birth and fortune, the Countess was one whom it would have been difficult to tolerate as the wife of an idolized son. As often as it was said of her that she was beautiful as an angel, was it retorted by some bystander, “ as a *fallen* angel.” Even the rare perfection of her personal charms was deteriorated, to an observant eye, by the haughty expression of her countenance. Her face was like some beautiful Italian flower-garden, overshadowed by pine-trees.

Nor did the reputation of the fashionable widow inspire more confidence than her physiognomy. Like the defeatures produced on the seashore by successive tides that leave long ranges of entangled weeds and broken shells, her coqueties had too often risen to the mark of indiscretion not to have imprinted an injurious blemish. The infatuated few, who

admitted her follies to be numberless, protested indeed that

Look in her face, and you forgot them all :

while the indulgent *many* attributed the levity of her habits of life to the too early widowhood which had rendered her her own mistress, before the wilfulness of girlhood was past.—

That the liberty thus acquired was not distasteful was evident from the fact that, after twelve years' freedom, the Countess of Belvedere still retained her franchise of widowhood.—It is true, her adventures in the interim might have filled volumes. But they had never been of a sufficiently glaring nature to endanger her place in society.—Costly entertainments and considerable tact in the selection of the objects of her hospitality, assigned on the contrary the most brilliant *éclat* to her coterie; and while humbler sinners sunk to the ground under the unsparing scorn of the Pharisees of London life, Prelates and their wives, Chief Justices and their daughters, were

scarcely less assiduous than the votaries of fashionable folly in paying their court in Belgrave Square.

For *in* that court was included courtiership to personages far more influential than herself!—The mansion of “Lady Bel.” was a sort of House of Call for ministers. It was irresponsible,—it was neutral.—Nothing in broadcloth and kerseymere to require explanations of defection, or remind people of broken pledges when the day of reckoning arrived. Honourable members of either House were there, to offer up their incense to the Muse or Grace (as Lady Belvedere’s caprice of the day might be) who presided as divinity of the Temple; and if, while swinging their censers, conversions were effected or compromises undertaken which, elsewhere, had been rebuked by the forked tongue of irony, the event served only to assign new importance to the accredited head-quarters of intrigue.—

“Strange,” mused Reresby, on returning

that night to his chambers in the Albany,—
“ that, among these men, who pass for first-rate—men capable of connecting with the tribunal of posterity the immutable examples of the past,—the most important questions of the day should be discussed in a tone more flighty than I yesterday heard indulged in by the frivolous circle of Lady William Apreece! Is there no such thing, then, in modern society, as conscientious obligation?—Is no one in earnest?—Do people trifle with what involves the health, both moral and physical, of millions, only to tickle some fashionable Influence with the exquisite delight of a joke?—GOD mend us!—In my anxiety not to pass for a prig, let me beware of the contrary extreme!—Glynne was right, — *quite* right! — Lady Bel.’s set would fritter me at once into nothingness! — *I* am not a Necker, with courage to wear my shoestrings in defiance of a crowd of courtiers in diamond buckles.—If I am to be any thing in this world, or fulfil but

one of the good purposes chalked out for me by my father,—above all, if I hope ever to achieve an independent position for Magdalen and myself,—let me eschew the seductions of Capua !” —

A heavy sigh and prolonged reverie followed this involuntary reverting to the name of Magdalen ! For if the charm of her beauty and artlessness remained strong as ever in his heart, the more largely he mixed with the world, the deeper and sadder his conviction that, the moment his engagement was completed, he must mix with it no more. The habits of Magdalen’s education must estrange her irreconcilably from a sphere whose very dialect was an unknown tongue. What would she find to say in answer to the jargon of those with whom the dinners of the last two days had brought him acquainted, or how was her country simplicity to contend against the piquant grace of such a woman as the Countess of Belvedere ; against the bon mots that

sparkled from her lips; the prompt and decided opinions, announcing her mind to be on most subjects made up; or the expressive smiles and vivid glances, imparting brilliancy to the one and vigour to the other; above all, the high-bred ease that prevented her judgment from appearing opinionated, or her eccentricities absurd?—

The retiring delicacy of Magdalen's manners and her submissive indecision of mind might render her, indeed, a pleasanter companion for the fireside. But, in the first bewilderment of personal distinction, poor Reresby was beginning to fancy a fireside the pleasing refuge of mediocrity, and to dream of a brighter world elsewhere.

Had he found himself of decided consequence in Lady Belvedere's set, he might have adhered to his defiance of the wand of Circe. But he saw that he was held of small account, that he had a field to conquer;—or rather that, to attain even moderate consideration,

he must fight inch by inch over the ground. All this was a stimulant. Like Caius Marcius, he was not to be called "boy" with impunity.

"Before I make my final retreat," said he, after writing his acceptance of a second invitation to Belgrave Square, "I must teach these people that it is a proof of strength and not of weakness. They must learn to miss me. They must find out that the loss is not wholly on my side!"—

CHAPTER XVI.

And at the last, a path of litel brede
I found, that gretly had not used to be;
For it forgrown was wyth gras and wede
That wel unnethes a wight might not see.
CHAUCER.

At Deaswold, meanwhile, the spring appeared to progress with a lagging pace.—More especially at the Rectory. The wistful eyes of poor Emma peered out in dispirited weariness from her close sitting-room upon the dun and flowerless lawn; wondering whether the gay hepaticas would *ever* brighten the dreary borders, or *when* the buds would begin to swell upon the green rods of the musk-rose branches ranging in unsightly disorder across the window. As yet, there was nothing to tempt the golden beaks of the blackbirds from

their hiding-place. As yet, there was no pretext for so much as a weeding-boy to enliven the deserted place. The very evergreens drooped in sickly languor. No life,—no hope in that gloomy little garden!—

It was not, however, ennui alone that weighed down the poor girl's heart. She was thinking, with as much philosophy as was compatible with her unsubtle nature, that, if Deaswold had become a more prosperous, it was a far less cheerful place than before the advent of the Mordaunts. As sunshine extinguishes the logs upon a blazing hearth, the glories of Deasmarsh had proved too much for the village. Cromer Hall was in the right! Her uncle, though he did not see far, saw clearly. Deasmarsh was the sole origin of her estrangement from her cousin Magdalen; and but for occasional glimpses of the luxurious life of the Mordaunts, she should still look forward to a tea-drinking with the Miss Moulseys at Basinghill, as a first-rate enter-

tainment; and, perhaps, but for Reresby's banterings, fancy Aristobulus Settringham the great man he fancied himself. All she had heard and seen and *felt* at Deasmarsh invalidated her apportioned enjoyments;—but for which, there had been less occasion for such painful efforts at cheerfulness whenever her father, on entering the room, found her with one of her aching temples resting on her hand, instead of engaged in the tasks from which her happier girlhood derived both profit and pleasure.

As the spring advanced, indeed, the good Rector put these exertions oftener to the proof, by inviting her, whenever a gleam of March sunshine seconded his wishes, to accompany him in his walks. By a thousand artifices of affection did the tender father endeavour to assign an interest to these homely expeditions. He could not take her to the Hall, indeed; for, between him and his brother's family, the distance was wider than

ever. Nor would he escort her to Deasmarsh, for of its comforts and attractions he was beginning to fear that his poor little girl had seen but too much. But he contrived to pass through the village, and, as if unintentionally, place before her eyes the condition of many whose lot was wretched compared with her own, and who addressed themselves, notwithstanding, cheerfully and even enjoyingly to the duties of life. Or, pretending business in his vestry, he managed to guide her across the churchyard so near the tablet erected to the memory of her mother, as to justify an allusion to her memory,—to her virtues,—to her early death,—and the consolation he had derived and still expected to derive from the affection of her surviving child.

It did not surprise the good man, after these indirect appeals to the better feelings of the poor girl who hung upon his arm, to find by a few convulsive sobs that, though silent, she was deeply moved.—But he gained

little from the tenderness roused by his lessons. Though, the next time they met at table, Emma exerted herself doubly to appear interested in the news of the day, as derived from the newspaper, or his morning's ride, she talked so much at random, made such miserable confusion of names, dates, and places, and, above all, exhibited so much paler a face than usual, and eyes so doubly heavy, that her father resolved to leave her for the future to herself.

That he was himself the cause of her griefs, that the frankness with which he had disclosed the denunciations of Ralph Drewe had revealed to her susceptible feelings not alone that she had become an object of indifference to Reresby Mordaunt, but that he had bestowed his affections on another, was not likely to enter his head; and all he wanted was some motherly counsellor, some person of her own sex to consult concerning the best mode of restoring her spirits. But the neighbour-

hood afforded only Mrs. Mordaunt to whom he could appeal; and he had a repugnance to apply to Deasmarsh! To complain that Emma's life at the Rectory was a dull one—that, in consequence of a family dispute which deprived her of her cousin's society, she wanted companionship,—would have sounded like a reproach for the diminution of their attentions.

As remedies are often extracted from the bitterest herbs, a sneer from one of his female neighbours at length suggested what his own kindly nature had not afforded.

Forced into conversation by the spinsters of Basinghill, by an encounter with their pony-chaise in a narrow lane, he could find no better answer to Miss Moulsey's rebukes concerning the length of time that had elapsed since he or his daughter visited the Manor, than to complain that Emma was poorly.

“How can you expect her to be otherwise,” retorted the tart damsel, “so long as you keep

her moped up at the Rectory! In *my* young days, my dear sir, the very word *ennui* was unknown! But now that schoolgirls and schoolboys are allowed to complain of being bored, Miss Emma probably finds her days longer than before you thought proper to quarrel with your brother's family; and before she got her head turned by the flighty ways of Deasmarsh Park."

Yes—the moral malady under which the poor girl was sinking *was* perhaps "*ennui*!" —Too late now to consider whence the contagion was derived, or how it might have been avoided, the anxious father dwelt only upon the remedy to be applied. A total change of air and scene seemed indispensable; and, as a sister of his late wife, who was settled in one of the pleasantest suburbs of London, had more than once expressed a wish to become acquainted with her niece, he decided that a portion of his prudent economies could not be better applied than in a journey to town,

where the advice of Lady Barton might possibly assist him in his projects for the future happiness of his child.

Without a word of intimation to Emma, therefore, he completed the necessary preparations; nor, till he had received an acquiescent letter from his sister-in-law (the widow of a scientific professor, who resided in a villa at Kensington) did he fully communicate his plans.

Even a journey to London, however, to which the repining girl had looked forward in former years as an impossible pleasure, failed to bring more than a passing gleam of colour to her cheek. Her father had been a little afraid of seeing her *too* overjoyed; but her utter listlessness on the occasion far exceeded his wish.

It is true Lady Barton was to Emma only a scarcely-remembered aunt, and somewhat formal correspondent. But, if it were only change she wanted, or, according to Miss

Moulsey's account, to escape the monotony of home, she might have shown a *little* more satisfaction at a scheme concocted only to afford her pleasure.

As a matter of form, it was decided between them that they must pay a P. P. C. visit at Deasmarsh. The Rector had business to entrust to his brother magistrate, and was desirous to recommend to his notice a young clergyman, named Milnward, who, during his absence, was to supply his place in the pulpit. And while occupied in these explanations in the study, Emma hastened to announce to Matilda and her mother her departure for town. "She was about to spend a month in London with her aunt Lady Barton."

So slight and uninteresting was her intercourse with this unknown aunt, that she had never happened to mention her name at Deasmarsh; and a month in London with a Lady Barton, so near the commencement of the fashionable season, sounded to Matilda as like

an intimation that she was about to bring to a crisis her too-long suspended flirtation with Sir Herbert Glynne, as to the mother of Reresby (to whom the Deasmill episode of her son's life was still a mystery) a threat that she was bent upon completing in town the conquest which timely interference had been the means of frustrating at the Rectory.

Although, therefore, on her entrance, both mother and daughter, on noticing the delicacy of her appearance, had experienced a momentary qualm of conscience concerning their previous neglect, their hearts hardened again on hearing of her approaching departure. While expressing ceremonious hopes that she might enjoy her visit to London, each would have given much to render it impossible;—and their manner towards their young guest grew constrained almost to incivility;—till, in Matilda, poor Emma discovered once more the cold reserved Miss Mordaunt of their first acquaintance;—and in Matilda's mother, the

“ purse-proud ” woman she had so often heard vituperated at the Hall.

It was a relief to all parties when the Rector arrived to claim his daughter, and they took leave together ; and, while hazarding, as she quitted the room, a glance into the conservatory, the scene of her former or rather her *only* moments of youthful illusion, the brilliant bloom of the Persian lilacs and moss-rose trees which, at the same season only a year before, had struck her as so delightful and so beautiful, seemed to poor Emma to exhibit a sort of baleful charm ! As soon would she have placed herself under an upas tree as sat listening again, in that specious spot, to the touching verses of Tennyson, recited by the treacherous voice of Reresby Mordaunt !

The train of reminiscences thus evoked, subdued her spirits to even more than their usual despondency. Had her father, whose heart was warm with the hopes inspired by

their forthcoming journey, caught sight of her face, he would have seen that it was pale as ashes; and that tears stood in the hazel eyes which used to glisten aforetime with such different feelings on entering the lodge-gates of Deasmarsh!—

It was a soft balmy April day.—The hedge-rows were fragrant with violets and gay with the white blossoms of the thorn; while the bright green grass afforded by its pleasant elasticity a still more grateful assurance of the earth's revival. To enjoy these welcome tokens of Spring, the Rector proposed that, instead of taking the high road, they should skirt the river side as far as the extremity of the Park, and regain the village by the green lane dividing the Deasmarsh property from Cromer Hall.

Lost in reflection,—the father upon the duties he was to transmit to his delegate, and his daughter reverting in dreamy sadness to the days of dangerous joy, when she used to

canter along that grassy level in company with Reresby and his sister, mounted on a beautiful black barb called Ayesha, broken for Miss Mordaunt's use,—neither of them noticed, as they approached the bushy purlieus of Deasmill, an unusual stir in the air; till, on passing a stile leading from the park into the lane, a few yards from the paling of Clemson's premises, the jar of wrangling voices served to rouse them from their reverie.

“What is the matter?—What can they be quarrelling about?” said Emma to her father, her curiosity *almost* excited by such unusual sounds of strife. On which the Rector, an habitual queller of discord, requesting her to await his return in the winding of the lane, proceeded straight to the mill for the purpose of ascertaining the matter in dispute.

It was a green and shady nook where Emma was left standing;—in Summer time, as completely overshadowed by the lofty trees

skirting the lane as a linnet's nest in a hedge; but even now, so sheltered round by grassy embankments, and so fragrant with white and purple violets, that a more impatient person than the Rector's daughter might have been content to rest herself on the bank.

And content, for a time, she was; but on finding that, even after her father, usually so authoritative among his parishioners, had entered the Clemsons' premises, the contending voices continued in dispute, and that many minutes elapsed without affording symptoms of his return, she proceeded leisurely towards the garden-gate, to inquire the cause of his delay.

To her surprise, the group collected in front of old Clemson's house consisted of labourers belonging to the parish; most of them known to her by name. For, from their angry tones while addressing not only the inoffensive old dame but even their revered pastor, she had expected to find the place

beset by trampers and vagrants; nor could she imagine the motive that actuated their squabble. The cause of Mrs. Clemson's indignation, indeed, was sufficiently manifest, in the injury which the intrusion of more than a dozen pair of hobnailed shoes had wrought in the flower-garden, the pride of her days, which her goodman had that very morning been hand-raking into the neatest order, after the Spring sowing. But even this provocation was scarcely a sufficient justification of the acrimony with which, disregarding the presence of the Rector, she was addressing the constable of Deaswold.

"I tell you there's no more grounds for saying 'twas found on *our* premises than Squire Mordaunt's or Squire Cromer's!" cried she;—"and so I'm ready to swear on oath, afore e'er a justice of peace in the county!"—

"No need at present of your oath, my good Mrs. Clemson," interposed the Rector. "At the proper time and place, it will doubt-

less be required. All you are now asked to do is to allow—”

“ No, no, indeed, sir,—no, your reverence, I can’t and I won’t !” interrupted the poor dame, all but wringing her hands. “ It has cut my heart to pieces only to look at it, sir. And if so be I’m to have it in my own sitting-room, as sure as there’s a judgment to come, I shouldn’t never be able to bide in the place again !”

Laying his hand soothingly on her arm, the pastor proceeded to expostulate earnestly with his agitated parishioner ; although in tones too low to reach his daughter’s ear.—But Emma’s interest in the scene was by this time too strongly excited for forbearance ; and while her father, having led the old woman towards her own threshold, stood too deeply engaged in remonstrance to take heed of what was going on at the gate, she slipped into the garden and reached the group of disputants.

All gave way as she approached ; for the Rector's daughter, young as she was, was both beloved and respected in the village. Even Ralph Drewe, the fellow by whose misrepresentations she had been made the object of such unjust aspersion at Cromer Hall, hung back as her light foot advanced along the gravel, so as to expose to her at a glance an object that lay there, as if deposited by the men collected around.—A ghastly object ! —the body of a dead child,—an infant, —swollen as by drowning, and placed upon a heap of sedges still wet and slippery from the stream !—

Impossible to describe the contrast afforded by its pallid immobility, to the animated aspect of nature around !—

A sudden dizziness overcame the brain of poor Emma Cromer at a spectacle so undreamed of. Seizing the arm of the person nearest to her, she endeavoured to support herself while contemplating the face of the

poor infant. But either some painful association connected with Deasmill, or the frightful word "child-murder," which was circulating from lip to lip, proved too much for her self-possession. For even before the constable could dart forward to direct his reverence's attention to his swooning daughter, the poor girl suddenly relaxed her grasp upon the sleeve to which she was clinging, and rolled senseless at his feet.

When her father, warned by the general outcry, proceeded to raise her tenderly from the ground, her face was lying within a few feet of the murdered babe;—and as he bore her inanimate form into the house, which Mrs. Clemson had previously refused to open to the body that would necessitate the sitting of an inquest within her doors, the indignation with which all present had been upbraiding the old lady's un-Samaritan-like hardness of heart, gave place to whispers of wonder, "not loud but deep," at the excess

of emotion betrayed by the Rector's daughter.

"I s'pose, after all, it warnn't *her*, then, eh, that I saw give the meeting to the young chap from Deasmarsh, here in Clemson's outbuildings?"—chuckled Ralph Drewe aside, to those of his fellow-workmen who were less favourably disposed towards the Rectory. "Ay, ay! — Dame Clemson knows what she's about.—'Tain't nothin' new to *her* to have the young lady locked up in her parlour."—

And by degrees the interest arising from the discovery of the murdered infant was effaced by curiosity arising from the hints of the informer. On the former point, they had heard everything related to the constable that was as yet known;—how, in opening a water-course flowing from Squire Mordaunt's park, one of the drainers employed on the Deasmarsh estate had found an obstacle embedded in the clay of the river hard by

Deasmill: which proved, on careful removal, to be the dead body of an infant, having a stone fastened with the fragment of a silk handkerchief to the neck. Immersed till the moment of removal in running water, no signs of decomposition appeared, by which inferences could be drawn concerning the time it had been in the water. But, now that exposure to the atmosphere was producing the usual results, there was every reason to suppose that the body had lain some weeks in the stream.

“Them as put it there knows best,” said Ralph Drewe. “But I’ll stake my week’s wages that it was folks to whom the mill-works is better known than to e’er another soul in the village.”

All this had been fully discussed previous to the arrival of the pastor; nor could the wisdom of the constable or gossip of any of the parties present supply rational grounds for surmises touching the origin of the poor babe so inhumanly dealt with. Medical aid

had clearly not been afforded to the mother ; and there was reason to infer that foul murder had been done. But none,—not the slightest,—for the discovery of the offender ! Suspicion rested neither upon wife nor daughter of the village.

Not that Deaswold, more especially since traversed by a railroad, could pretend to immaculate virtue. But whether as magistrate or pastor, the rule of Jacob Cromer was so instinct with the mercies of primitive Christianity, that no misguided woman had need to stifle in the river the evidence of her frailty. Exhortation and remonstrance were afforded to lead sinners to repentance ; but nothing was said or done, either in the pulpit or justice-room, to drive them to despair.

Infanticide had consequently become an apocryphal crime in the annals of the parish ; and the consternation excited by the sight of the dead babe lying livid before them upon the rushes, was all the stronger. Several of

the labourers present declared that, if the act could be brought home to a daughter of their own, they would give her up at once to the gallows; and bitter and opprobrious names were bestowed upon the wretched woman who had found no pity for the cry of her new-born child.

So loud was the cry for vengeance that, even when Mr. Cromer re-appeared and issued instructions to the constable for the transfer of the body to the parish poor-house, to await the summoning of an inquest, it was with some difficulty he prevailed on the crowd to disperse.—The dead infant was taken up, and enveloped in a cloth for removal; and still, idlers kept hanging about the premises.

Stimulated by Ralph Drewe's misrepresentations, they were resolved to see more of the state of the young lady's feelings who, when taken by surprise, had been so strangely overpowered;—and though Emma was forced

to accede to her father's desire that she would lie down for an hour or two, and remain safe under Mrs. Clemson's nursing while he proceeded with the constable into the village to execute the necessary forms before returning to lend her his arm ; and though, to persons of *their* class of life, the waste of a day is the loss of a loaf, even when, towards sunset, the pastor re-appeared to claim his daughter, Ralph Drewe and one of his comrades were still loitering in the lane.

Had it not been for the vexatious circumstances under which his brother the Squire had pointed out the fellow to his attention, Jacob was too much absorbed by the sad scene which had been passing under his eyes, to take heed of his presence. But it was impossible for the maligner of his darling Emma to pass unnoticed ; and never having happened to be brought face to face with him since his painful discussion with the Squire, the Rector could hardly refrain from shaking

his staff menacingly at the fellow, whose skulking figure met his eye precisely in the ambush from whence he stated himself to have watched the meeting between Emma and the young heir of Deasmarsh Park.

This momentary irritation, however, and even the indisposition of his beloved child, were overlooked in the unpleasant duties awaiting his arrival at the Rectory. His parishioners were now astir;—all commenting, —all exaggerating, —all suggesting. — The coroner had been sent for; and from house to house, throughout the village, went whispers of wonder and commiseration.

Even had not the state of Emma's health necessitated the postponement of their journey, the conscientious Jacob would have felt it right, under such circumstances, to remain at his post. He would not have been satisfied to leave the case in the hands of so rigid and uncompromising a dispenser of the law as his brother magistrate at Deasmarsh.—

That which at present appeared a premeditated crime, might, he trusted, prove the result of ignorance and fear;—the fear inducing some *very* young girl to conceal a birth and death, for the former of which alone she was accountable.

But it was in vain he endeavoured to suggest this probability to the good faith of others. The surgeon by whom the body of the child was examined, pronounced that it had not only been born alive, but had received after birth its natural nutriment; thereby so exasperating public feeling against the unnatural mother who could have nursed and yet doomed it to death, that the benevolent Jacob could not help wishing the man of science a little less circumstantial in his testimony.

Bad enough to have a wanton and a murderess in his parish!—But to *his* feelings, the idea was scarcely less overwhelming of having to give up to capital punishment a woman to

whom he had preached the gospel of peace. For prisons, condemned cells, the hangman and the halter, were not to him *mere* words, as to many who pronounced them.—As a magistrate, he had considered it his duty to acquaint himself in detail with the ignominious paraphernalia of the worst rigour of the law; and scarcely a year had elapsed since, in company with Mr. Mordaunt, he visited a condemned prisoner at Northampton, and endeavoured to soften with words of grace the stubborn heart of a malefactor.

All he could now do, however, after receiving from the coroner the verdict of “wilful murder” returned by the jury, was to pray inwardly and heartily that, since human justice must have its way, it might not fall upon persons too feeble or too hardened for human retribution to produce an example advantageous to the community at large.

CHAPTER XVII.

C'est un avantage pour la vie entière d'avoir été malheureux dans l'âge où la tête et le cœur commencent à vivre. C'est la leçon du sort !—Elle forme les hommes bons ; elle étend les idées, et mûrit le cœur avant que la vieillesse les aie affaiblies.

OBERMANN.

Scenes and arguments such as these afforded sad preparation for poor Emma's journey to town !—As soon as the inquest was over, and the Rector had seen consigned to the earth the body of the hapless child unentitled to the solemnization of the rites of the church, he was the first to hasten their departure ;—eager to escape all further discussion of an incident so unsatisfactory.

Not a soul in the village but had already visited Deasmill, to survey the spot where the

body was found ; and the poor-house, to examine the fragment of silk produced before the coroner, as having been tied round the throat of the child ;—and a warrant was in readiness in the hands of Mr. Mordaunt against the person or persons unknown, whom an active constable was intent upon bringing to light.—*His* further aid, therefore, might be dispensed with in the business ; and the absence of his daughter while such inquiries were pending being doubly desirable, the lapse of a few days saw them settled at Lady Barton's villa.

For Villa was the name which Mr. Cromer's prim sister-in-law chose to bestow upon an old-fashioned brick-house in the High Street of Kensington ; having in its rear a walled-garden full of leaden figures and evergreens that would have done honour to the Borgerhout at the Hague, from whence William of Orange imported the exact model of the suburb that started into ugliness under

his royal auspices westward of his English capital;—and though as unsightly and uninteresting a residence as the stiffest and most angular boarding-school of that birch-consuming neighbourhood, poor Jacob hailed it as a happy exchange for the grass lawn and blackbirds of the Rectory.

Though his sister-in-law's taciturnity might have proved at any other time a little repellant, it was a comfort to his humane heart to feel secure against further questions concerning the finding and condition of "the body;" or being asked at all moments of the day by every soul, gentle or simple, with whom he came in contact, "what chance of detecting the murderers?"—

For Lady Barton was a cold formal little woman, who, in the dispirited air of her pretty niece and the abstraction of her brother-in-law, saw only the gravity becoming his cloth;—nay, had they visited her the preceding year, she would have been

shocked at the levity of character apparent in both.—

For she was one of those who aptly illustrate the definition that “ceremony is a habit of the body invented to cover the deficiencies of the mind ;” disguising her real insignificance under an almost Spanish dignity of reserve.

The husband whose knighthood had deceived the Mordaunts into supposing Lady Barton a denizen of May Fair, was in his time a painstaking *savant* ; who, by the discovery of some very small planet or very useless gas, had made his way into a professor’s chair, and entitled himself to be presented at a levee and converted into a Sir Nicholas ;—by which operation, both himself and his wife,—(or, as it better becomes us to call her, his lady,) fancied him endowed with all the consideration of a Sir Humphrey Davy.

Her childless leisure thenceforward made a hobby of what she called his “European

renown;" for, by means of those filaments and feelers which pretenders to scientific distinction manage to put forth, in foreign countries, the discoverer of what no one cared about, now it was discovered, had contrived to affix to his name the initials of certain continental orders of chivalry, almost as unknown to fame as the planet, or gas, or semi-metal he had dragged forth from obscurity.

These insignia of knighthood looked well however on the title-pages of the pamphlets, emitted ever and anon by the learned knight, to keep the Royal Society and Philosophical Transactions in mind of him;—and, better still, when appended to his name in the catalogue of the exhibition of the Royal Academy, which, season after season, was sure to contain a portrait either in oils, chalk, miniature, marble, wax, cameo, or intaglio, of Professor Sir Nicholas Barton,—K. L. M. N. O. P. Q,—no matter what.—The old house at Kensington still bore witness on its walls, as well as

on slabs and brackets, and in every corner, how very plain and stupid-looking a man may become, by sufficient labour, the discoverer of planets and gases.

Still, however, his ambitious relict sunned herself in his slender ray of glory; and on the strength of an overgrown mural tablet in Kensington Church, wherein the Barton arms were emblazoned in coloured marbles, and the number of the late Sir Nicholas's foreign knighthoods enumerated in all the letters of the alphabet, she invariably qualified herself as "the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton."

To follow out the pretension, the little dry chip of a ladyship assumed a rigidity of deportment worthy of a ruff and farthingale. Had Sir Isaac Newton left a widow, she could not have been more primly self-conscious; and, as the world is easily imposed upon by gravity of mien, the annual conversazione at which "the accomplished widow of the late cele-

brated Sir Nicholas Barton" collected together the learned pundits, artists, and men of letters with whom herself or the late celebrated Sir Nicholas had in the course of their vainglorious lives scraped acquaintance, almost rivalled those of Babbage, Murchison, or the Marquis of Northampton.

So eagerly do man-and-womankind throng together to stare at swans with two necks, and calves with six legs, that a more extensive announcement of the presence of Professor Griebuth from Abo, and Signore Pandrizzano from the Observatory of Palermo, to say nothing of the domestic astrologer of the Imaum of Muscát in the full costume of his caste, would have sufficed to collect under Lady Barton's roof half the dowagers of the peerage.—But, as it was, she had little to complain of; as the multitude of cards thrust under the frame of a frightful oval looking-glass, surrounded with plaster chains and balls which, in the course of the last century, had

probably exhibited a tinge of gilding, could attest, to such as were not too much afraid of a coating of dust to peruse the honourable and right honourable names therein recorded.

In the course of the first four and twenty hours spent by Emma Cromer with her aunt, she had to undergo an enumeration of titles, as included in Lady Barton's visiting list, which, in the innocence of her heart, she wished could have been made to excite the envy of the Mor-daunts, as well as her own exceeding weariness.

To cultivate by ceremonious card-leaving these grand acquaintanceships, was the chief object in life of the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas. The vain pretensions of a series of years had so consolidated themselves into shape and substance, as almost to impose upon herself. She *really* fancied the defunct planet-seeker a great philosopher, and his widow a component part of the world of science; and the imperial dignity she assumed, in consequence, with the country cousins who

were strangers within her gates, was no more than she considered due to their difference of station and intelligence.

In such an aunt, poor Emma soon saw that she must not look for the maternal friend which, in spite of Lady Barton's ceremonious letters, she had almost expected to find in her mother's sister; and even the more sanguine Jacob satisfied himself, within the first few days, that there was as wide a difference between their natures as distance between Kensington and Deaswold.

On his venturing, during Emma's absence from the room, to advert to the nature of the painful incident which had retarded their journey to town, the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas screwed up her mouth to dimensions that rendered the existence of the feature almost as problematical as that of the planet discovered by her learned husband; and, on expressing a hope that her niece had been kept in ignorance of a fact

leading to such indelicate surmises, and learning how much poor Emma had suffered from becoming an accidental witness of the discovery, Lady Barton drew in the prudish skirts of her clothing, on her niece's re-entrance into the room; as though even her own high-dried immaculateness might suffer by contact with one whose eyes had been exposed to so contaminating a spectacle.

Her estimate of her country kinsfolk was, in fact, somewhat disparaging. Aware that the Rector's daughter depended on his prudence for her future provision, she had carefully eschewed acceptance of the often-proffered hospitality of Deaswold Rectory, lest it should be expected of her, in return, to divert any portion of her havings from the collateral heirs and namesakes of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton. Still, though holding aloof from intimacy, she had mentally endowed the Cromers with a sort of legendary consequence, as belonging to an

old Northamptonshire family, and holding a living adjoining the family estate which supplied her with such abundance of game.— But now that, by catechizing her simple-hearted niece, she ascertained that they were not on visiting terms with Cromer Hall, and that their only neighbours were a family of Lancashire cotton-spinners, of whom, from a certain choking in the throat whenever she attempted to utter their name, the poor girl spoke as slightly and succinctly as possible,— Lady Barton began to perceive that the sister who had been fifteen years in her grave, had made but a bad match for herself and was much to be pitied, after all.

The sentiment, however, entitled her to exercise the most patronizing authority over her niece ; and she no longer submitted to the simple way in which Emma wore her ringlets, or fashioned her dress.—What could *she* know, poor girl, of the ways of the world ; buried all her life in a country village, with

no other model than a family of cotton-spinners!—

It is true that, at the *conversazione* given as in honour of her country cousins, Emma saw nothing in the air of the female guests of Lady Barton to justify the severity of her fastidiousness:—their costumes being “translated from the French,” with singular deviations from the text; while the organs of invention of Lady Madrepore and certain others of the bluest of blues, appeared to have been taxed, even to extravagance, for the creation of their costumes.

Accustomed to the chaste simplicity of dress of her cousin Magdalen, or the costly elegance of Matilda Mordaunt, Emma could scarcely understand the monsterring of nothings perpetrated by the female moieties of the celebrities, gathered together by the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas.

She was, however, too completely out of spirits to enjoy the risible side of the affair.

The few really eminent persons present commanded her respect: and though she wondered a little what could have brought them so far to converse together, when they might have confabulated so much more pleasantly in town, she was not the less grateful to her aunt for pointing out the president of such and such an association or academy, and principals of colleges without end. If the professors of poetry appeared sufficiently prosy, and certain distinguished romanciers sadly inclining to the *pot au feu*, she made no avowal of her disappointment.

So proud, however, was the relict of the celebrated Barton, of the learned literary and scientific congress she managed to assemble, that her displaced furniture was restored to its customary formality, and the smell of the lamp had evaporated from her dingy staircase, before she could divest her little person of the air of dignity with which it was invested by the mere duty of curtseying

to such eminent personages. Nay, in the enthusiasm of the moment, fancying that, because R. A.s had accepted her invitation, she must be a distinguished patroness of the arts, she proceeded to the extremity of hiring a glass coach (of the species supplied by Chancellor to convey the pupils of Kensington boarding-schools to dentists and the Eidouranion), for the purpose of chaperoning her niece to the private view of the Royal Academy.

It was one of the gala days of her dull year; one of the annual revivals of her withered laurels; one of the occasions forcibly impressing on her narrow mind that she was the widow of a late celebrated Sir Nicholas. She delighted in finding herself in contact with dilettanti lords and ladies,—primates, prelates, and every variety of the shovel-hat and silken apron,—cabinet-ministers,—renowned diplomats,—Miss Angela Burdett Coutts, and others of the chosen few tabooed

from indulgence in livelier pleasures than ancient concerts, oratorios, and picture galleries. While deliberately and dignifiedly ascending the staircase, she looked full into the faces of those she met; with a mild but self-satisfied consciousness that, had not the "late celebrated" poised his telescope or simmered his crucible to some purpose, she would not have been there.—

Unaware of being peculiarly blest in the privilege of entering those crowded rooms four and twenty hours before the price of twelvepence enables every apprentice in London to enjoy the same advantage, poor Emma gave herself up without reserve to the enjoyment of the pictures. And a great pleasure it was. Having never before surveyed a large collection of modern paintings, her untaught eye was more captivated by the brilliant colouring and *ad captandum* subjects before her, than by the dingy Hobbimas and gloomy Carraccis at Settringham Abbey. The

very blue skies, *very* blue mountains, and *very* blue seas and rivers of the landscapes, delighted her unformed taste ; and while examining the pink and white portraits of young ladies, with hair that looked like an advertisement of Willis's Mirific Balsam, and white satin whose gloss might have driven a dressmaker into hysterics, she could not conceive finer things of Raphael !

And, then, Landseer's colts were all but neighing ; and there was a little pathetic episode by Frank Stone, that caused even episcopal eyes to glisten, and " drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek " in the shape of one of the bitterest Barons on the Bench, which made the Catalogue tremble like an ague-fit in the hands of the tender-hearted Emma !—

So absorbed, in short, was the unsophisticated girl in the more striking features of the gallery, that the widow of the late celebrated might almost as well have been alone ; and, but that her country cousin was entitled

to go back to Deaswold and acquaint the cotton-spinners, her neighbours, of the privileges and immunities accorded to the memory of the late Sir Nicholas, which had enabled her privately to view the exhibition of the Royal Academy in company with some thousands of distinguished persons,—Lady Barton would have regretted not having secured her usual companion, the portly relict of an Archdeacon residing in Trevor Square, also the widow of a “late celebrated;”—a volume of occasional sermons, bearing his very reverend name, being asked for, once in five years, or so, at Hatchard’s.

Reduced to the consolation of occasionally dropping a prim curtsey to some eminent individual, who acknowledged it by an equally ceremonious bow,—and finding the study of the fashions for May on the persons of a few elegant women a pleasanter pastime than hazarding an attack of ophthalmia by fixing her eyes on the glare of the pictures,—Lady

Barton had been guilty of as many yawns as perhaps were ever produced by the occasional sermons of her friend the Archdeacon; when her ear was arrested by the silver but decided intonation of a voice that appeared to be laying down the law in an elaborate criticism of the exhibition.

Unaccustomed, in a clique the prevailing colour of whose cloth was black, to find so much authority conceded to the weaker vessel as the ayes and other acquiescents of the interlocutors accorded to the lady in question, her surprise was at an end when, on turning round for a personal scrutiny of the parties, she beheld the beautiful woman, attired in the extreme of fashionable splendour, who was instructing a cabinet minister, a lord of the bedchamber, and two or three other men of less notoriety but more striking presentment, what they were to admire in the pictures, and what to make a bid for in the sculpture.

The Kensington lady decided that some very great personage was before her;—too young, indeed, for one of the princesses of the blood; and, albeit her air was foreign, speaking English too well for an ambassadress. But the deference with which everybody made way for her approach proved her right, if short of divine,—that is, short of *royal*,—to be highly patrician; and the “widow of the late celebrated” set her down as, at the least, Mistress of the Robes!

By the young man on whose arm she sometimes leaned, and into whose ear she sometimes whispered, but who was oftener despatched hither and thither, to ascertain the number of some picture before which a crowd was collected, and determine from the name of the artist in the catalogue whether it were worth getting elbowed to look at,—her divinity, indeed, appeared to be fully admitted. Lady Barton, as she knit her narrow brows to gaze upon them, decided

that she had never seen so handsome a couple ; and, when another cabinet minister added himself to the group, and the courtliest of foreign diplomats set his *langue bien pendue* in motion to unite his compliments to her ladyship with his compliments to the exhibition, the little lady, who had shrunk into almost nothing, could no longer refrain from jogging the elbow of her niece and directing her attention towards the strangers.

The artless face of Emma Cromer, flushed with excitement arising from the interesting picture she had been contemplating, proved apparently as striking to the fashionable Countess as her own Mechlin lace and tortoiseshell parasol to Lady Barton. But what was the amazement of the frigid aunt when, in addition to the looks of admiration lavished upon her niece by the Mistress of the Robes, the young man on whose arm she had been so familiarly leaning, hurried towards Emma with

an extended hand, full of kindly recognition and friendly inquiries after her father.

Unversed in the proprieties of life, it did not occur to Emma, nor did her aunt's fidgety gestures avail to suggest, that it would be proper to present to her chaperon this familiar friend. She explained, indeed, that she was "on a visit to her aunt Lady Barton;" but used the direct name, without the smallest allusion to the "late celebrated," and spoke of the neighbourhood of town without specifying her residence at Kensington; so that the sensitive old lady felt her dignity considerably impugned.

The undisguisable confusion of countenance exhibited by Reresby Mordaunt at an unexpected encounter with the cousin of Magdalen under circumstance so suspicious, being, however, naturally laid to her niece's account, long before the colloquy between Emma and young Mordaunt wore to end, Lady Barton had founded a romance *à la*

Calprenède, in twelve volumes, upon their mutual embarrassment.

That the cavalier accompanying so influential a lady as the one she had by this time heard addressed as "Lady Belvedere" could be little short of a lord, she nothing doubted; and what she had treated as listlessness or stupidity on the part of her niece might, after all, be the preoccupation of a tender attachment for some Lord Alfred or Lord Algernon! So handsome a young man, so graceful, so elegant, so high in worldly distinction, presented indeed a sufficient apology for the poor girl's infatuation!—

Lady Barton even stifled the reproofs she had been meditating, in the eagerness of her interest concerning the handsome stranger; and as Emma replied to her questioning simply that he was the son of one of their Northamptonshire neighbours (without allusion to cotton-spinning) who had lately distinguished himself in parliament, and further inquiry

brought to light that he was the identical Mordaunt whom even the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton's beloved Morning Herald saluted with notes of admiration, she not only forgave his deficiency of peerage, but re-entered her glass coach (leaning on the arm of a meagre old footman, pepper and salt from the crown of his head to the gaiter of his shrunken shank) as proudly as though it were a coach and six !—

CHAPTER XVIII.

Tell me, wherein have I offended you ?
Have I affected wealth or honour,—speak ?
Are my chests fill'd up with extorted gold ?
Is my apparel sumptuous to behold ?—
Whom have I injur'd that ye seek my death ?
These hands are free from guiltless bloodshedding,
This breast from harbouring foul deceitful thoughts.

SHAKSPEARE.

Was ever feather so lightly blown to and fro as this
multitude !—

SHAKSPEARE.

No announcement of the Rector of Deas-
wold's sudden expedition to London (the first
in her life even attempted by his daughter)
having transpired in the village previous to
the still more remarkable event which had
struck dismay into the hearts of young and
old, the journey was instantly attributed by
those idle talkers who love nothing better than
to misaccount for the movements and motives

of their neighbours, to his reverence's desire to divert the young lady's attention from the sad sight she had witnessed, which was said to have excited such potent emotions in her mind.

"His reverence wishes, no doubt, to drive such a terrible story out of her young head," said the Deaswold blacksmith, in whose shop the question was discussed.

"But why more terrible to *her* than other folks?" inquired a matter-of-fact farmer, who was waiting, beside the anvil, his turn to be served.

"'Cause a young lady's feelings is finer and more delicate-like than the darters o' carters and ploughmen!" was the bitter retort of Ralph Drewe, by whom the subject had been broached. "And no doubt the young miss felt it the more from seeing the murdered babby laid out at Deasmill,—a place as she's so fond of—and, as we all know, she's been 'customed to make a hiding-place!"

“ What d’ye mean by hiding-place ?” cried farmer Richards, turning roughly upon him.

“ I mean what I say, and what I’ve seen master Richards !” retorted the labourer,—
“ and what ’tain’t his reverence’s fault that I didn’t lose my work for saying stoutly that I *had* seen !”—

“ And what was *that*, Ralph ?” inquired the blacksmith, unwilling to discountenance either customer.

“ The meeting behind backs at odd times o’ young Master Mordaunt (as is gone to Lon’on to be parli’ment man) and the parson’s young lady,” persisted Ralph, unflinchingly ;
“ which I saw with my eyes more times than one,—and old Madam Clemson, for all her sanctified looks and mealy mouth, a-going between ’em to keep matters close.”—

“ And when was this, Ralph ?” inquired the blacksmith, applying his hammer ringingly to the iron as though a bit of gossip inspired him with courage to work.

" Oh ! times ago, — a good sight afore Shrove Tuesday."

• " And you said nought about it till now?"—

" Didn't I though !—I up and told Squire Cromer, chapter and verse, straight an eend, afore the sun went down, the last time as ever I saw the young folks give each other the meeting at Deasmill."

" The Squire ! — *Why*, what had *he* to do with his finger in the pie?—Why didn't you tell his reverence, when you were about telling?"—observed the incredulous farmer.

" 'Cause when even his brother repeated to him what I'd seen and said," cried Ralph, striking his stick angrily on the ground, " he gave no more belief to the story than if it had been told by crazy Hob."—

" The more to his credit !" cried the farmer.—" I'm of *his* way of thinking. I can't abide eaves'-droppers and tale-bearers. And if

e'er a man in the land came a 'costing o' me with stories about *my* wenches, I'd make no more bones o' laying him on the flat of his back, than o' shootin' a rabbit!"—

“And *that* maybe, you'd make bones on, if so be you wasn't a tenant o' Squire Mor-daunt's, who's got never a gamekeeper on his estate!”—added the blacksmith.

“No, nor e'er a tenant as wouldn't give the coat off his back to serve him!” retorted the farmer,—“which is more than can be said by the gentry at the Abbey or the Squire at the Hall, or any other o' the grandees, who'd risk the life of a fellow-creatur' to save that of a hen-pheasant.”—

“But if so be, Ralph, as you told, or *got* told to his reverence, how his young lady came 'courting unbeknownst to Deasmill,”—argued the blacksmith, partly to divert the farmer's attention from his clumsiness over his job,—“how come it as he brought her, of his own accord, and friendly-like, back to

the Clemsons'; so as she fell in the way o' seeing the corpse?"—

"That's more than I'll take on me to say!" said Ralph, doggedly.—"I can only tell what happened,—but not *why* 't happened. Only I've read in story-books and heerd tell, many's the time, that when folks have done aught that's amiss in a place, they've most times a nat'ral hankering to look at it again."—

"Gammon, gammon, gammon!"—cried the farmer, scornfully snapping his fingers.—"There ben't a better nor a modester young lady than Miss Emma in the village of Deaswold, let t'other be who she may. And she chanced to call at the Mill, 'cause she was out a-walking with his reverence, like a good dutiful darter as she is; and they'd both been together at Deasmarsh, a-calling on Squire Mordaunt's family; 'cause there's nubbody among all the gentry round but is proud to welcome 'em to their houses."

"Oh! there isn't, isn't there?"—cried

Ralph Drewe, wagging his head. "Well, that's news, somehow, I never expected to hear!"—

"Why you're not going to pretend that his reverence an't the best o' friends with the Abbey folks, — and the Deasmarsh folks, — and the old frumps, man and woman, at Basinghill; and who else is there, pray, of gentry hereabouts?"—

"*Who?* — Why the parson's own brother, sure!" retorted the informer.

"And d'ye mean to say, Ralph, that his reverence isn't made welcome to Cromer Hall?" — said the blacksmith, stopping short in his hammering.

"To the house of his father, and his father's father afore him!" — emphatically added the farmer.

"And if he was, pray," — was the round-about answer, — "why and wherefore should the Squire have out his old rips o' coach-horses, twice every Sabbath day, to carry the

family to Basinghill Church, astead a' biding in his own parish?"—

"That's true enow!" said the blacksmith, resuming his hammering.

"Bless ye! the brothers haven't exchanged so much as good-day sin' afore Lent!"—pursued Ralph Drew, pretending to whisper.

"That is, not since you kindled up unkindness atween 'em!" cried the stout-hearted farmer.

"At all events," added the bitter tongue, "you won't go to deny, I s'pose, the young Miss at the Rectory ben't thought fit company for the young Miss at the Hall? I'm ready to take my Bible oath, afore a magistrates' bench, that Squire Cromer said he'd lock up his daughter on bread and water, if ever he caught her exchanging so much as a word with her cousin!"—

"Eaves'-droppin' again, eh?"—cried the farmer—"Amazing what wonderful things

folks as is always a listenin' manages to hear!"—

"It is a queerish story, though, neighbour, one must allow?"—said the smith, turning up an inquiring eye at his customer, as he reached the last nail of the colt's last shoe—and a little surprised that Squire Mordaunt's tenant persisted in scouting the intelligence of a tale-bearer like Drewe.

On the other hand, all in the village were not equally mistrustful of Ralph's veracity.—His statement concerning the clandestine meetings at Deasmill had long preceded the discovery of the murdered infant;—and though there was no direct testimony connecting the two circumstances, the gossips of the village were not slow to ascribe the incidents affecting a spot so obscure to one and the same origin.

Mrs. Clemson, as a person who kept aloof from those who considered themselves her equals, had always been an object of dislike;

and now that she was accused of having administered to the frailties of her superiors, her neighbours set no bounds to their abuse.

“ They saw *now* why she had discouraged their visits to Deasmill. — Considering who frequented her house, no wonder she found her humble neighbours troublesome. Thank goodness, *they* had never been accused of harbouring young couples against the wish of their families, or suspected of aiding and abetting in putting an innocent babe out of the way.” —

For if, in cities, evil report find eagle pinions, how much more in an uneventful village, where it meets with no obstruction in its course, and is secure from the amercements which wounded honour imposes on a class still subject to chivalrous forms of retribution! —

The old dames who sat before their spinning-wheels, lying away the good name of their pastor's child, considered indeed that they had received provocation to severity be-

cause a Deaswold girl, named Alice Hakewill, who had been seen loitering at nightfall ten days before the discovery of the drowned infant, in the neighbourhood of the mill-works, had been subjected, at the coroner's suggestion, to examination by the matron of the workhouse. Instead of rejoicing that, by this prompt measure, an innocent person was rescued from suspicion, they began by whispering, and finally declared outright, that "if greater folk than poor Alice had been dealt with as rigorously, murder might have come out.—But 'twas only the children of the poor was open to suspicion:—only the children of the poor was subjected to insult!"—

At Deasmarsh, meanwhile, nothing transpired of this tale of village scandal. Mrs. Mordaunt was a woman too grave of deportment to encourage communicativeness on the part of her servants; and the mind of her husband was wholly and entirely engrossed by the

brilliant career of his son. Scarcely a day, but letters passed between him and Reresby. Gleanings from his own fertile fields of study were never wanting, to be tendered to one whose garnerers could not be too full ; and the cotton-spinner's daily *résumé* of argument in reply to the *résumé* of the debate of the preceding night contained in the Times, was a masterpiece of political writing by which his son was not slow to profit.—Questions of profound national interest were in progress of discussion : and it was pleasanter to write of them to the candid and intelligent young man prepared to meet him, point to point, with the practised vigour of an athlete, than to potter them over with Sir William Settringham, or bear with the mysterious nods and significant smiles that implied the dissent of the consequential but empty Aristobulus.

That his worthy neighbour Jacob Cromer was absent from the country during discussions which could scarcely have failed to pro-

voke misunderstanding between them, was highly satisfactory to Mordaunt; and as the zealous representative who replaced him at the Rectory, possessing the charm of novelty, contrived to draw larger congregations to Deaswold Church than had ever been collected there since the Mordaunts settled in the country, no one had cause to regret the sojourn of the Rector with the widow of "the late celebrated."—

The Deasmarsh family did not, however, note with the less disgust the occasion taken by the Squire of Cromer Hall to demonstrate his enmity to his brother, by resuming his attendance at the parish church, the moment Jacob ceased to officiate and Mr. Milnward assumed his place. No Basinghill, so long as his brother and niece remained the guests of Lady Barton; and the "rips" of coach-horses had consequently reason to promise themselves a holiday, every Sabbath, throughout the merry month of May.

But the calculation was premature. After establishing his little daughter under the care of her aunt, and seeing Emma resign herself cheerfully to the routine of the mildewed old mansion full of dark corners and light closets, which it was the widow of the late celebrated's pleasure to call a villa, the good Rector began to find the days hang heavy on his hands which, at Deaswold, he was accustomed to fill up with works of duty and mercy. He wanted sinners to lead, and old offenders to sentence to repentance.—He wanted sheep-stealers to commit, and drunkards to exhort;—he wanted discontented spirits to soothe into piety, and young children to brighten into the glorious intelligence that the rewards and punishments of this world are not all in all.

He hankered after home, in short; and hungered after the cure of souls committed to his guardianship like sheep into the hand of the shepherd;—and with the view of passing

among his flock a single Sunday of his six weeks' absence, set off by rail one pleasant Friday—(disastrous day for a journey!)—for Deaswold.

He arrived as safe, however, as though it had been Monday, or Tuesday, or any other day of the week ;—and pleasant was it to his cheery nature, after the dust and drought of a High Street and the Arabia Petræa of Lady Barton's high-walled garden, to inhale the fragrance of his own sweetbriars and honeysuckles, listen to his thrushes and blackbirds, and set foot on the elastic turf of his lawn.—His favourite cows, on returning from the pastures, acknowledged by an affectionate low the well-known voice and touch of their master. His crop-eared terrier leaped to his very waist for joy at seeing him again ; while the faces of his faithful servants expanded for glee : the master so much more loved and respected than feared being dear to them as their flesh and blood.

His young substitute, Mr. Milnward, on the other hand, had only satisfactory accounts to render. All had prospered. They had obtained no further clue to the perpetrators of the dreadful deed which had disgraced the village; but at least it was not followed up by further transgressions.

It struck the good pastor with some little surprise, indeed, that, when he made his appearance in the village the following day, his parishioners seemed to fly before his face. It could scarcely be fancy:—for at that season of the year and time of day, the cottage doors were invariably open, and the greater portion of the occupations of their inmates transacted in the air. But scarcely had he turned the corner by the churchyard-stile, when the women retreated from their washing-tubs, and the men from their working-benches;—and as he passed the smithy, the blacksmith contrived to be so busy at his forge as to avoid all need for salutation.

Even the children stared in his face with more of curiosity and less of reverence than their wont.

“I begin to perceive the truth of the adage,” mused the parson, good-humouredly, “that the absent are always in the wrong! Our London trip may do something towards restoring my little girl’s roses and cheerfulness; but it seems to have a trifle impaired my infallibility in my vatican of Deaswold.”

A bitter thought at that moment traversed his mind, that his brother was perhaps the origin of his decline of popularity! But Jacob was not the man to cherish bitter thoughts. He would not think so ill of the Squire. He would not think so ill of his father’s son. Moreover, the ingratitude of the vulgar is proverbial. Let the hand that gives them bread be but a single day withdrawn, and it will become as the hand of the stranger.

On the morrow, however, when officiating

in his sacred vocation, he *was* a little struck by the slenderness of his congregation. More than half the pews, habitually crowded, stood empty ! Of the vacancy of the chancel-pew belonging to the Hall, he took no heed ; unaware that, during his absence, his brother's family had re-transferred their devotions from Basinghill to their own parish. But Farmer Richards and his wife and children, who were as constant in their attendance at church as the parish clerk, were wanting ; though, only the preceding night, he had bidden them good evening from the Rectory gate, so as to be certain that it was not indisposition kept them away.—And twenty others—twenty of his most respected parishioners—were equally to seek.

The leaven of human vanity, scantily as it prevailed in his nature, suggested that the congregation had probably fallen off during young Milnward's administration ; and that his flock did not on this occasion expect the

Rector to officiate in person. But, as they were walking home after church, the young man, by way of mitigating the mortification apparent in the countenance of the pastor, indiscreetly attributed the empty pews to which Jacob had been preaching to the heat of the weather.

“Last Sunday, sir,” said he, “the morning was cloudy. But had the same crowd which *then* attended morning service been present to-day, the heat of the church would have been overpowering !”

But Jacob was not deceived. His was not a congregation of fine ladies. Swooning was by no means a favourite recreation at Deaswold. Throughout the dog-days, his church was more crowded than at Christmas. No ! some moral mischief must be in progress.

According to his custom, he retired into his study for rest and refreshment between the two services ; and, while communing with

himself in the stillness of his chamber, the idea that, during his absence, his brother might have been stirring up strife against him, recurred with such force to his mind as completely to unhinge him. His was not a heart to bear up against the conviction of personal unkindness. Moreover, the cause of dissension betwixt himself and the Squire was of so delicate and cutting a nature, that only to revert to it brought a gush of tears from his eyes.

When, therefore, he issued forth again from the Rectory, for evening service, the least observant person might have noted that his eyelids were swollen; and in addressing the "dearly beloved brethren," who were now diminished to so scanty a flock that they might have been numbered, one by one, his voice faltered so manifestly that, at the close of the first portion of the duty, young Milnward caused the clerk to hand him a slip of paper, hastily inscribed with pencil, proposing

to read the sermon ;—the heat of the weather being apparently too much for the Rector.

The hint sufficed to recall poor Jacob to himself. The hint sufficed to remind him that, in the house of God, he must not suffer his mind to stray to the things of this world ; and overmastering, by a strong effort of conscience, his painful emotions, he not only declined assistance, but preached with a degree of energy and unction, of which, till that day, he had never yet given proof. The Mordaunts listened with surprise and edification. They had always respected him as a worthy man. They had never before given him credit as an eloquent divine.

It might be that the discovery evoked certain qualms of conscience. For, suffering his family to return home alone, Mr. Mordaunt loitered in the churchyard, till Jacob and young Milnward emerged from the vestry door ; and, though too cognizant of the pastor's resolution against dining out of

his own doors on the sabbath-day to invite him to join their party at Deasmarsh, he did his utmost to persuade him to defer his morrow's journey, and become their guest.

But poor Jacob had little inducement, just then, to prolong his sojourn at home.

"I promised Lady Barton and my daughter," said he, "to be back by to-morrow morning; and they have made engagements, in consequence, that will hurry me away."

"At all events, you will not go by the early train?" inquired Mordaunt. "I have half-a-dozen things of more or less consequence to talk to you about."

Vaguely conjecturing that among these half dozen topics might be one connected with the singular ungraciousness testified towards him by his parishioners, the Rector readily undertook to postpone his departure till the afternoon. Before they took leave of each other at the churchyard turnstile, he had promised to breakfast at Deasmarsh.

Little did he surmise, good, honest man, that these things to be talked about “of more or less consequence” related solely to Mordaunt’s son, and the public questions to which Mordaunt’s son was bound hand and foot, at that moment, as stringently as Ixion to his wheel! With the inadvertent selfishness of the prosperous, his neighbour, the cotton-spinner, saw in him only a man who was come from the great Babylon where his son was achieving distinction by advocacy of the cause of the many against the iron hand of the few; and hungered and thirsted after the crumbs of praise which, in London, the Rector of Deaswold might possibly have picked up from the tables of greater men!

Even at the close of a meal far more resembling a dinner than the grandest attempts of the widow of the late celebrated,—even after the discussion of a guineafowl-pie *aux truffes* such as merited the approval of Chévet, washed down by a cup of Mocha that might have

cheered the jaded spirits of the most desponding Provisional going, Jacob found himself still wondering what his friend Mordaunt could have to say to him, to excuse an invitation to breakfast not extended to young Milnward.

Mrs. Mordaunt and her daughter inquired, with well assumed interest, whether Emma were "very gay in London?" to which he frankly answered "Gayer, poor child, than she had ever been in her life,—and a great favourite with Lady Barton"!—

And when Mrs. Mordaunt added, (prepared, perhaps, for an evasive answer,) "of course she has met with my son?" he replied with unsuspecting candour that "Mr. Reresby Mordaunt was at the exhibition of the Royal Academy with his daughter and her aunt, the very day before he left town."—

Had Matilda found courage to question the simple-minded pastor concerning Sir Herbert Glynn, she would probably have received an answer equally veracious and equally unsatis-

factory. But, as they had now breakfasted, and Jacob announced himself to have business at home preparatory to his departure for town, the master of the house proposed accompanying him back across the park.

"The shortest way, papa, is by Deasmill," observed Matilda.

"Quite as easy to cross by the East Lodge!" added Mrs. Mordaunt. "It seems an absurd prejudice, but, since that unfortunate event, I feel as great a horror of approaching Deasmill as the people hereabouts, whom Mrs. Clemson tells me she can hardly get near her to supply her with the necessaries of life."

Instead of answering, Mr. Mordaunt rose abruptly from table; but not before Jacob Cromer noted to his surprise a gesture of reproof escape him, as if to silence his wife. He was evidently distressed by the allusion to Deasmill and the "unfortunate event;" or rather, evidently expected that his guest would find it distressing.—

The Rector, the least mysterious of God's creatures, was beginning to feel grievously puzzled by these unaccountable mysteries.— Though previously of opinion that, in the course of his acquaintance with Deasmarsh, he had heard almost enough of the merits and abilities of the son and heir, it was absolutely a relief to him when, as they took their way together across the thymy herbage of the park, to the discomfiture of the beautiful flock of merinoes which the utilitarian cotton-spinner had chosen to substitute for deer,—instead of commencing the communication of a disagreeable nature, whatever it might be, which Jacob was vaguely anticipating,—Mordaunt suddenly burst forth into a new eulogium of the member for Castle Dangan!—

“I am told,” said he, “that the effect of his maiden speech was electric—that it has made a wonderful sensation!—And I promise you, my dear friend, that an effective speech in parliament is twice the thing it used to be.

Formerly, a man spoke only as the organ of his party,—and parties consisted of the ins and outs. Now, an administration is composed of half a dozen factions, and the opposition, of a dozen : and every man is expected to deliver his peculiar opinion, even at the risk of creating a thirteenth. A logical summing-up of precedents is no longer accepted by way of argument ; for, as we live in times that have no precedent in history, we must fain trust to instinct for our guidance.”

“Or rather to the one unerring code of right and wrong !” added the Rector, as became his cloth.—

But Mordaunt was not thinking just then of right and wrong. He was thinking only of his son.—

“I am not an ambitious man,” added he, “though I won’t assert as roundly that I am not a proud one, when justifiable cause for pride presents itself. And I must say ’tis a thing to make a father hold up his head a

little higher than usual when, in days like these, in days when the breakers ahead are so strong that even experienced pilots look pale, a young man like Reresby Mordaunt—I might almost say a boy like Reresby Mordaunt—rushes to the helm and effects what the son of Lord Melfont, with his first-rate education, and four centuries of nobility to bolster his consequence in the eyes of the nation, might as well attempt, as to jump over Plinlimmon!—I say again, that I really think I may be excused for declaring I would not exchange my son for any other young man of his years in the three kingdoms!”—

The Rector replied, though in a dispirited tone of voice, nearly in the terms expected of him. But of so vain-glorious a companion, stalking across his beautiful park with the sunshine of prosperity gilding every feature, how was he afterwards to inquire whether he could resolve him why the old women of Deaswold crept away into their homesteads at his approach?—

As they drew near Deasmill, however, (for, in a truly conjugal spirit, the moment Mrs. Mordaunt suggested it as a place to be avoided, her husband scorned to take any other road,) the Rector, though he appeared to be lending an attentive ear to the holdings-forth of his neighbour upon Protection and Free trade, became so lost in reminiscences of the fatal spectacle which had grieved his heart at his last visit to the place, as unconsciously to lower his voice to a whisper, in delivering the monosyllables for which Mordaunt occasionally paused, as even a painstaking horse relaxes his speed for the stimulant of his master's voice.—He spoke faintly, and his face was as ghastly as his voice was faltering. No person who met them by the way could have surmised that their discussion was merely of a political nature.—

“Good bye, then, my dear Cromer !” said the cotton-spinner, when at length they reached the opening to the lane ; “since I cannot per-

suade you to give us a whole day, good bye!— Let me hope that all I have been saying has produced some effect on your mind : and that when you see my young vagabond in town, you will impress on *him* the solemn lesson I have endeavoured to make clear to yourself.”

And having heartily shaken hands with him, Mordaunt turned his steps towards home.— But poor Jacob, overcome by careful thoughts till his blood curdled in his veins, felt so unequal to proceed, that for a moment he leaned heavily for support against Clemson’s palings ; even at that moment of self-absorption, it struck him as a remarkable coincidence that, on raising his eyes, preparatory to proceeding on his road, they fell upon the hateful face of Ralph Drewe ; who had been an unseen spectator of his parting with the master of Deasmarsh.

CHAPTER XIX.

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the shame,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!

SHAKSPEARE.

“But you should have told me, my dear !
—You should have fully explained the circumstances and pretensions of the family at Deasmarsh Park !” remonstrated Lady Barton, in alluding, during her brother-in-law’s absence, to their encounter with Reresby Mordaunt.

“I mentioned to you, dear aunt, if you remember,” pleaded Emma, “that there was a family from whom I had received much kindness, residing within a mile of the Rectory.”

“Yes—but you spoke of them as people who had made their fortune in business—

just as *I* should describe the retired haberdasher who lodges opposite! — You ought to have explained their immense wealth (in these times, wealth is consequence!) Above all, you should have stated that the son was in parliament.”

“I fancied that you must have noticed his name in the Debates.”

“Of course.—Who has *not*?—But how could I know it to be that of your country neighbour? — And now, when your father meets the family in Northamptonshire, and they naturally speak of their son as having been present at my *conversazione*, what will they think on learning that he was not even invited?”

“If you knew Reresby Mordaunt as well as I do, my dear aunt, you would feel how much he would be out of place in a party of elderly people,” was Emma’s over-candid reply.

“Elderly people, child!—You surely do

not expect personages of extraordinary celebrity to be boys and girls!" exclaimed her indignant aunt. "However, it is not yet too late. I shall give another party for the express purpose of inviting him. Nay, I am half inclined to make it a dinner-party—a *snug* little dinner!"

On which announcement, Emma, who, having some experience of the snug dinners of the widow of the "late celebrated," was able to contrast them with the noble hospitality of Deasmarsh, could hardly refrain from a shudder.

"It is for *your* sake, my dear, that I am inclined to take so much trouble," resumed Lady Barton, self-complacently. "A young man like Mr. Mordaunt is, under certain circumstances, a most desirable acquaintance."—

"Not for *me*, dear aunt!" replied Emma, hastily. "There are reasons which—that is—I have reason to be certain that—that Mr. Reresby Mordaunt has no desire for further intimacy."

"Ay, ay!—Exactly what all young ladies of your age say, or are bound to say, on such occasions. You did not wish me, if you remember, to invite your friend Mr. Settringham to my party."

"Only from his being so excessively tiresome"—

"Yet you saw how eagerly he accepted the invitation!" continued Lady Barton, disregarding her. "He came, I noticed, among the first, and stayed till the last."—

"Yes!—because Mr. Settringham is accustomed to —" Emma was all but betrayed into saying "stupid parties." But it was not difficult to modify the phrase into "the society of learned people."—

"As a country neighbour of Mr. Mor-daunt's," added Lady Barton, "it might be as well perhaps to invite *him* to our dinner; for, not being a marrying man, it would take off any particularity in the invitation to your young friend."

"But my dear, dear aunt," pleaded Emma, warming with the annoyance of having the fickle Reresby singled out for attentions purporting to bring them together, "believe me, *one* is as little a marrying man as the other; that, if you are planning a match for me with either, you might as well invite Mohun Lāl or any of your Oriental protégés for the same purpose!"

Lady Barton's dry face relaxed into a demure smile.—She resolved, however, to take no further steps in the business till her brother-in-law's return from Deaswold. And when, accordingly, poor Jacob made his appearance, harassed by the perplexities of home, and overcome by the fatigue of his journey, ere he had time to brush the stain of travel from his coat or wash the dust from his mouth, his anxious hostess closeted him in the stuffy little room she called the "boodore," to direct his attention, by mysterious hints, to the broken spirits of his daughter, pre-

paratory to the disclosure of her projects.

“I am convinced there is something seriously the matter with the poor girl!” said she. “At her age, my dear sir, it is not natural for a young person to be so indifferent to the pastimes of life. On Saturday, my poor niece declined accompanying me to a charming and most edifying lecture on Catoptrics and Dioptrics at the Royal Institution, on pretence of disliking a crowd. And yesterday, after church, when Sir Grimwood Hopkinson, the learned Egyptian traveller, who lived five-and-twenty years in a cave (like St. John at Patmos), deciphering hieroglyphics, brought here the famous Bavarian Professor of Chemistry, Manixellius,—and, as there happened to be several eminent persons (as usual, on Sunday mornings) calling upon me, they sat for several hours discussing the transactions of the last meeting of the African Society, instead, I say, of evincing interest in so exciting a discus-

sion, Emma remained pale and cheerless in a corner, as though she were going to faint !”

“The heat of the day, probably,” pleaded the Rector. “But may I ask, my dear madam, what you infer from all this?”

“That the dear child has something on her mind ;—that she had formed some unfortunate attachment before she quitted Northamptonshire.”

“I trust in Providence *not* !” replied Jacob, fervently ; for, in the course of his hurried and heated journey Londonward, his thoughts had reverted from the strange conduct of his parishioners to the still stranger accusations of his brother which had produced such complete estrangement between them, —till his mind was distracted by painful surmises.

“So thoroughly am *I* convinced of it,” persisted the prim aunt, overstepping even her convictions in the desire to honour the roof of the late celebrated with a snug little

dinner party, comprehending a meteoric member of parliament and the eldest son of an ancient baronet, "that I am bent upon inviting to dinner the object of her mysterious attachment."

"You know him then?—Emma has *admitted* that her affections are engaged?" said the Rector, his voice faltering from the sad conviction that his daughter had attached herself where hope there was none.

"She has said only so much in contradiction as maiden modesty required," simpered Lady Barton. "And, though I do not pretend to be of a romantic turn (which would be highly unbecoming the widow of a man devoted, like the late eminent Sir Nicholas Barton, to the cultivation of the physical sciences), there is so much that is recommendable, in a worldly point of view, in a match with this youthful Canning, as to justify any encouragement and assistance my niece's well-wishers are able to afford."

“Not for worlds, my dear, good sister-in-law!” exclaimed the distressed father, vainly endeavouring to regain his natural voice. “Forgive me for entreating you to do what the over-eager promptings of goodwill too often render difficult—namely, let well alone!—Trust me, these young people would have found means of meeting before this, had the wish been mutual. And I ought to be thankful to the Almighty that it is not; my neighbour at Deasmarsh having, long ago, apprized me of his intention to establish his son brilliantly in life, by a marriage with the opulent daughter of his former partner.”

“Ay, *long ago*, perhaps,” persisted the officious lady, to whom a project of any kind afforded a novel excitement. “But now that the young man has distinguished himself in public life, the Man of Capital will grow more ambitious. He will want countenance—he will want connection;—and between the heiress of a brother cotton-spinner,

and the daughter of an ancient Northamptonshire family (niece of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton), will hardly, I should imagine, hesitate !”

“Hardly, indeed !” reiterated Jacob, shaking his head. “But it would be a painful thing to me, my dear madam, considering the close intimacy and neighbourhood in which we live, to put his firmness to the proof. I must, therefore, earnestly entreat that you will attempt nothing further to bring the young people together.”

Inexperienced in supplication, the Rector spoke more peremptorily than he was aware of; and unluckily the woman whose life was so uneventful instantly chose to convert her niece into a victim of parental injustice. “But for the false pride of her brother-in-law, the poor child might make an excellent match !”—

And from the day this crotchet entered her head, by incessant hints and mysterious allu-

sions to a subject so painful to one of the parties, and so alarming to the other, she contrived to render them both thoroughly uneasy.

Meanwhile, the individual who had reduced to gravity the laughing countenance of Emma Cromer, and was causing to her fond father such bitter moments of care,—to say nothing of other heartaches of his creation in Northamptonshire and elsewhere,—was as little mindful of his conquests as the greatest of the Cæsars. The stronger ambition of public distinction had fixed its hold upon his mind : and, womankind—tell it not in Gath—appeared almost as great an obstacle to his projects as the heavy baggage of an army.

Even the beautiful Countess of whose insolent air of prosperity and fashion poor Emma had been restlessly dreaming ever since their encounter at the National Gallery,—(convinced that Magdalen would be wrecked against *her* superior attractions, as *she* had been sacrificed to those of Magdalen,) de-

rived her chief consequence in his eyes from her intimacy with Lord Fauconberg, and the collision ensured him in Belgrave Square with the leading opinion-makers of the day.

Sir Herbert Glynn, who stood watching him afar off, no longer with anxiety but regret,—as a philosopher notes the transformations of some beautiful insect,—could not refrain sometimes, at odd moments, with the shaving-brush in his hand, or pushing across the less frequented paths of Kensington Gardens to satiate a love of exercise begotten by his uncouth habits of travel,—from soliloquizing over the moral decadence of his friend.

“After all,” muttered he, “I’m afraid a roc’s egg is easier to find, than a fellow of *really* liberal opinions!—So long as men have their Greek and Roman history by heart, and a tendency to verse-making at the neb. of their pen,—amazing in what magnanimities they indulge!—But if laurel-wreaths were

devised to hide the bald head of a victorious emperor, they have done far severer duty in fostering the sprouting of ass's ears !—What a fine fellow was Reresby at Eton !—what a fine fellow when we used to cleave the blue waters together every morning, towards Mitylene, before we started for the East !—What a second-sight of glorious emotions and achievements revealed itself to his nature !—And to have subsided already into a mere lord-hunting, lady-rhyming young man about town !—I have seen him dance attendance, side by side with that cornet-à-piston Lord Richard Lovell, upon Lady Bel.; who hesitated to *which* to give her arm, just as she might puzzle herself to which of her footmen to entrust her lapdog !—

“ But why feel surprised at *his* sinking into pigmyhood,” he would continue, taking larger strides both in his walk and monologue, as his irritation increased, — “ after seeing even his parents,—even that robust-

mind ed old father and seemingly upright mother,—the moment they had conquered an independence entitling them to form a position for themselves,—a position where the transitions of modern society afford good ground where the altars of true gods might be erected,—truckle to ennobled lumps of clay like the Melfonts, and fancy themselves doing enough for their daughter by buying her way into the peerage!—Alack for human nature!—Let our missionary societies expend millions in putting down idolatry in the East, and destroying among the Hottentots the worship of Mumbo-Jumbo!—But between idolatry of the Golden Calf on the part of great people, and adoration of great people among the children of Mammon, hang me if the first and second commandment be not oftener broken in the West end of London, than on the banks of either Ganges or Gambia!”—

Sir Herbert’s disgust at the subservience of his friend in Belgrave Square was however

accidentally modified.—Overtaken one day in Kensington Gardens by the curiosity-monger, Lady Madrepore, he found himself inextricably seized upon as an auditor, till the nearest gate afforded opportunity for escape.

“Admit, my dear Sir Herbert,”—cried she, the moment she brought herself abreast of the panting fugitive,—“admit that, after all, I was right!—The papyrus your friend Mr. Mordaunt was good enough to bring me from Dendera,—”

“Which he bought at a curiosity-shop in Compton Street, in order to preserve his own collection from pillage—” mentally added Sir Herbert.—

“*Does* contain,” resumed the museum-loving lady, “an account of the expedition into Persia of Rameses the Great, vulgarly known in history by the name of Sesostris!—Such was the opinion of Champollion, by whom the papyrus in question was examined before it left Egypt; and such the opinion of

Klaproth and Kosegarten. And though Satorlini, Rosellini, and Nestor L'Hôte had their doubts on the subject, what were they, after all, but mere theorists, by the side of the great Champollion !”

“Too bad of Mordaunt,” mused Sir Herbert, laughing in his sleeve,—“to have hoaxed this foolish woman at the expense of men so eminent !”—

“But my misgivings are now cleared up,” added Lady Madrepore, with an air of gratified conviction. “Professor Slidderbottom of New York, (a neophyte of the remarkable school founded by Gliddon) who is now actually on his way to Berlin to consult Dr. Lepsius, and one of the most learned Egyptologists of the day, has seen my papyrus and confirmed the judgment of Champollion !—I am at this moment on my way back from Kensington, where I have been to thank my friend Lady Barton, (widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas) by whose kindness Pro-

fessor Slidderbottom was brought to my soirée."

"A favour to be truly thankful for!"—replied Sir Herbert with a smile which the impetuous rarity-monger did not accept as ironical.

"A most worthy person is Lady Barton," resumed the talkative lady.—"I am indebted to her for several of my best autographs:—one, from the great Linnæus to Professor Snitzenheim of Heidelberg, enclosing a rare specimen of the Icelandic flea; and another from the renowned John Tradescant, of which the ink is so pale that you cannot decipher a syllable except by chemical process."

"A valuable document, certainly. If all Lady Barton's treasures be equally available——"

"You would speak of them with more deference, perhaps," interrupted his companion, "had you seen the charming girl, who, in addition to Professor Slidderbottom, accompanied her to my *olla podrida*. But,

perhaps, you know Lady Barton's niece?—for there seems to be a vast intimacy between her and your handsome friend, young Mordaunt!"

"Indeed?—I understood from public report, which is good enough to trouble itself occasionally with his affairs, that his chief intimacy with the frailer sex was in the person of my cousin Lady Belvedere?"—

"*Was* and *is* are two different tenses!" rejoined Lady Madrepore.

"At this season of the year, you know, (as my friend little Hayward says) intimacies melt like ices.—*A la fin, tout casse, tout passe, et tout lasse!*"

"And how long, pray, have things been 'broken' between Lady Bel. and the Honourable member of Castle Dangan?"

"Broken? Oh! pray don't quote *me* as your authority. I am not aware of having said anything of the kind.—But certainly dear Lady Bel. did seem a *little* surprised that an insignificant girl like Miss Cromer

should engross so much of her *preux chevalier's* attention the other night at my house;— where they sat talking together in a window-seat the whole time the New Zealand chiefs were chanting their hymn !”—

“ Flat blasphemy !” exclaimed Sir Herbert.

“ And she was so urgent last night when I mentioned (as we were coming away from Lady Drax's concert,) that I was to call at Kensington to-day about my papyrus, that I should drop in at Belgrave Square on my return and give her the particulars of my visit, that I can't help fancying the fair widow is the least in the world jealous.”

“ Lord Fauconberg's Madonna Laura *jealous* of a country Miss ?”—

“ My dear, dear Sir Herbert !—in what hermitage have you been hiding your head for the last fortnight, not to know that Lord Fauconberg is going to be married to a lump of virgin gold,—a Welch heiress, with a slate quarry, and the mountain where all the famous

mutton comes from, for her dowry?—Twelve thousand a-year,—and not an idea in the world!”—

“An heiress and a simpleton!—I wonder whether there are more of them where she grew?”—

“*Entre nous*,” continued Lady Madrepore, “the world *does* say that Fauconberg took umbrage at the favour with which the new member was received in Belgrave Square. But that, instead of mourning in black and white, he wisely adopted Hymen’s saffron robe.”

“Why surely no one, even in this wonderfully clever century, was ass enough to conceive that a man so prudent in his generation as Fauconberg looked for anything in Belgrave Square beyond an excellent *restaurant*, with a handsome *dame de comptoir*?”—

“Oh! fie, fie!—what chivalry! what—”

“Disgraceful,—is it not?—But tell me, my dear madam, what report are you conveying

to Lady Belvedere concerning the *jolie fille du Faubourg* ?"—

"Only what you probably know by heart, as you are sometimes the guest of his father,—that *hers* is the parson of the Mordaunts' parish."

"And are such uninteresting despatches worth taking your horses so far out of the way as Belgrave Square ?"

"Hardly, I admit!—But Lady Belvedere promised me a charming *cadeau*, if I would take the trouble of calling!—What do you say to an enamelled *bonbonnière* with a Petitot in the lid—said to be the very one in which the celebrated Maréchale de l'Hôpital, formerly Marie Mignot, used to offer *dragées* every day to Casimir, King of Poland, while coaxing him into an offer of his hand ?"—

"What do I *say* ?—Why that Lady Bel. pays as largely for priority of information as the Times or Journal des Débats!—Should

you find her at home, pray tell her I will acquaint her, for half the money, of more than all she wants to know concerning the birth, parentage, and education of Emma Cromer."

Sir Herbert would have accomplished her ladyship's purpose far better, however, could he have satisfied her curiosity concerning the subject of her *tête-à-tête* with Reresby Mordaunt at the conversazione of Lady Madrepore. For plain enough to all present was the emotion betrayed in the countenances of both, when, in his anxiety to obtain intelligence concerning Magdalen, and unwitting of the estrangement that had sprung up between the Hall and the Rectory, he inquired "what news her father had brought from the country concerning the family at Deasmarsh, and what news of his own?"—

Indignant at his audacity, Emma fixed her eyes upon him with an intentness purporting

to convert him into marble; but which had only the effect of making the conscious young man blush scarlet, as she replied—“You allude, no doubt, to my cousin Maglen? My father did not see her during his trip to Deaswold. The two families no longer meet. An idle village rumour relative to some mysterious meetings at Deasmill, last winter, produced a serious misunderstanding between my father and uncle.”

“I was not aware that they had quarrelled. But I fancy Mr. Cromer of the Hall is a pertinacious, irritable man,” said Reresby, looking as uneasy as his worst enemy could desire.

“Irritable indeed!—My poor cousin has a sad time of it!” resumed Emma, almost sternly. “Though papa did not see her, he was told by the gentleman who has taken his duty that she is looking wretchedly,—and no longer the same person as when last autumn, at the close of the shooting season,

she was so beset by your and Sir Herbert Glynne's pointers!"—

"She could afford *that*:—for *then*, she was the loveliest creature I ever beheld!"—said Reresby, beginning to suspect that his little plaything of former days was taking the liberty of talking at him.—

And for a moment Emma was startled out of her self-possession.

"There is much to render poor dear Magdalen unhappy at home," she continued, after a moment's pause. — "No friend,—no companion,—no sympathy in her own family—"

At which announcement, the assumed coolness of Reresby gave place to manifestations of anxiety.—

"And now that the displeasure of her father and mother has broken all bounds," continued Emma, watching his changes of countenance, which almost mollified her resentment, "I fear she leads a wretched life."—

"It is some time," stammered Reresby, fancying she paused for a reply, "since I heard news of Cromer Hall."

"And if you *had*, the domestic history of so insignificant a family as ours is scarcely likely, I fear, to engage your attention," was Emma's supercilious rejoinder. "Still I fancied that from the circumstance of your brother being at Cambridge—"

"I have not seen him since the autumn. —Tom spent the vacation at Burtsmill."—

"In that case," resumed Miss Cromer, a little subdued, "you are not likely to have heard of my cousin Stephen's rustication; since which, he has been living at home; —disquieting his family as much by his ill-temper, as, when at College, by his ill-conduct."—

"And to the despotism of this ill-conditioned brute is my poor Magdalen hourly exposed!" mused Reresby. And, for a moment, he felt ashamed of his too-ready abdi-

cation of independence ; and resolved to obtain from his father, if not exemption from his promise, at least permission to communicate more freely with her to whom, in all honour and faith, he had plighted his troth.—

Such was the true origin of those demonstrations of emotion on the part of the young couple, which more discerning persons than Emma's chaperon might have been excused for attributing to the impulses of secret attachment.—

“ I can promise you, my dear sir,” said Lady Barton to the Rector, after a florid description of this party, from which his instinctive horror of blueism had caused him to absent himself,—“ I can promise you that the attentions of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt to my niece are the theme of general observation. Professor Slidderbottom inquired whether they were not engaged lovers. Nay, I received congratulations on the subject from more than

one of those illustrious friends of the late Sir Nicholas who frequent Lady Madrepore's coterie."

Jacob replied only by a heavy sigh. Grievous was it to his affectionate and candid nature to apprehend that the child of his heart had been deceiving him.—The seemingly guileless manner in which Emma had replied to the inquiries prompted by the Squire's malicious report, had completely satisfied his honest confiding mind. But now that the disinterested testimony of Lady Barton concerning the origin of Emma's repinings at Deaswold and fretfulness in town, — of her wasted form and altered countenance,—and, above all, of the evident understanding subsisting between her and Mordaunt, afforded such undeniable grounds of suspicion, he was doubtful only whether to hazard an appeal to the love and duty of his child; or wait till the reaction of her natural instincts of affection recalled to

her young mind that no human protection,
—no human attachment,—can ever rival the
love with which “a father pitieth his own
children!”—

CHAPTER XX.

As the poor frightened deer, that stands at gaze,
Wildly determining which way to fly,
Or one encompass'd with a winding maze,
That cannot tread the way out readily,
So with herself is she in mutiny,
To live or die, which of the twain were better,
When Life is sham'd, and Death Reproach's debtor.
SHAKSPEARE.

The situation of Magdalen meanwhile was fully as deserving of compassion as her cousin had described it. Over *her* destinies, no doating father extended the protection of his prayers; nor did a single ray of this world's sunshine intervene to lighten the dreariness of her fate. Nay, she was regarded at the Hall as one who afforded neither pleasure nor profit, and on whom a

vast deal of useless accomplishment had been thrown away.

The Squire, indeed, indulged in a vague kind of conviction that it was all the fault of the cotton-spinner ;—that, had not his daughter been outblazed by the superior advantages of dress and fortune enjoyed by Matilda Mordaunt, the son of Lord Melfont might have bent his knee at Cromer Hall, instead of Deasmarsh Park. But he did nothing to improve her opportunities of mixing with the world. Every year, he saw less and less of his country neighbours ; unable to pardon their intimacy with the Mordaunts, and unwilling to bring his meagre cheer into comparison with the prodigal hospitality of the *novus homo*.

But it was not solace from without that was wanting to Magdalen. To join the finest archery-meeting ever collected at Grovynor Chase, would not have afforded her a moment's satisfaction. Nothing comprised just

then within the limits of Northamptonshire, would have sufficed to quicken the current of her blood. Amidst the domestic storms evoked at the Hall by the misconduct of her elder brother, and the audacity with which, as heir in tail to an unalienable property, he stood his ground against the irate Squire, she maintained the same unnatural apathy, the same oppression of body and mind, which had hung over her ever since she became aware of the unjust aspersions she had caused to attach to her innocent cousin, and the unbrotherly feud she had provoked between her father and uncle.

Of the dreadful discovery since made at Deasmill, less had reached her, perhaps, than any other person in the parish. Before a girl of her years, it was not likely to be canvassed : accident alone having rendered her cousin Emma cognizant of the circumstance. She was vaguely aware that an inquest had been held in the village on the

body of a child supposed to have been murdered. But, on hazarding an inquiry concerning the verdict, had been too roughly silenced by her brother to revert to the subject.

Though debarred from all intercourse with the Rector, she seemed to feel a sort of solace and support so long as her uncle and cousin remained in the country; and on learning their sudden journey to London, all courage forsook her heart. The weedy, ill-kept shrubberies, in which she was accustomed to loiter away hour after hour, chiefly to escape the surly company of her brother Stephen, who seemed to take pleasure in venting upon the feeblest thing within reach the ill-humour engendered by his father's reproaches, seemed suddenly to have become too lonely for endurance; and one afternoon, when the Squire and his son had proceeded on the pony and the old bay mare to Basinghill, for the despatch of turnpike business with Aristobulus Settringham, she took one of those desperate resolu-

tions that sometimes dart like a knife into the breasts of the unhappy, and hurried through the plantations and down the green lane to Deasmill!—

Some latent hope was in her soul that Reresby might have broken the promise extorted by his father (which he had announced in the letter conveyed to her hands after much difficulty and delay, by Mrs. Clemson), that, as miserable as herself, *like* herself, his powers of patience might be exhausted. Perhaps, *perhaps* he had written again!—Perhaps a precious letter might be waiting for her at Deasmill!—

With every pulse in her frame throbbing from fear and excitement, she skimmed along the green lane: pausing ever and anon to listen whether, amid the hum of summer insects, the rustling of birds in the hedges, and reptiles startled away amid the long grass of the high embankment, no sound was discernible of other footsteps than her own!

But

The beating of her own heart
Was all the sound she heard!—

No one was at hand but the troubled girl, who had visited the spot so much too often for her peace.

Had any unseen spectator witnessed the look of anguish with which Magdalen Cromer surveyed the scene of her former happiness,—the spot on which, for months, she had not ventured to feast her eyes,—the emotion that filled them with unshed tears, and caused her finely-formed lips to tremble, might possibly have been connected with the tragedy by which that fatal spot was made memorable in the eyes of the village. For though the remorse of her innocent heart was as different from the dark shadow that dogs the steps of crime as the briar-rose from the deadly nightshade with which it intermingles its bloom, the beautiful face of Magdalen was as pale, and her gait as irresolute, as though, indeed,

she were approaching a spot which blood-guiltiness rendered terrible to her soul.

Scarcely had she courage to turn the latch of the Clemsons' garden-gate ;—scarcely self-possession to note the neglected aspect of the place, so smiling with flowers the preceding summer ! The sound of coming footsteps, however, now rare at Deasmill, had already brought poor Mrs. Clemson to the threshold of her deserted house ; and in *her* appearance, at least, the change was not to be overlooked.

No sooner did the old lady recognize her visitor, than her hands were outspread to motion her back.

“ Oh ! Miss Magdalen, Miss Magdalen ! ” said she, when, instead of obeying the signal, the anxious girl glided forward to express sympathy in her indisposition,—“ don't come here, my dear ! Don't do yourself no further mischief by venturing again to this fated place ! ”

“I should have been here long ago, had I guessed you were ill,” replied Miss Cromer, who made no movement to retire. “But, having found myself watched at my last visit, I did not dare return.”

“Right, my dear young lady, quite right! But you should not be here *now*!—Harm enough has come of your visits already.”—

“Not to you, I hope, my kind friend?” rejoined Magdalen, taking between her own the old woman’s wasted hand.

“Ay, both to me and mine, and you and yours!” she replied, mournfully shaking her head, while retreating hurriedly into her house, so as to draw in with her the guest whom a moment before she had warned to depart. “And *that* it is, Miss Magdalen, which is carrying me down to my grave! For ’tis a hard thing to have lived without reproach till the hairs are gray upon one’s head; and then, find one’s neighbour’s turn their backs upon one. And if so be the

wicked tongues which have so troubled themselves about us was to see you here, my dear, at this moment—”

“I came only,” replied Magdalen, faintly, (overpowered at finding herself once more in that well-remembered room) “I came only to thank you for the letter which, some time ago, I received, thanks to your interference;—and to inquire,” added she, in a lower voice, “whether, perhaps, another might not have reached you from the same quarter?”—

“How should a letter reach me *now*?” cried the old lady, with sudden sternness. “Mr. Reresby’s been gone from Deasmarsh for months and months; and out of sight’s out of mind, as maybe you’ve found to your cost, Miss Magdalen; for you look sadly ill, my dear, and not what you used, when the brisk air, last autumn, brought brightness into your face.”

“I have not been very well, or very happy,” added Miss Cromer, as if to deprecate any

feeling of animosity against her on the part of her hostess.

“ If I’d only known, my dear young lady,” returned the old woman, a little moved by the plaintive tones of her voice, “ where to have addressed Mr. Reresby in Lon’on (which is so vast a place that, even though a parliament man, my letter might be slow of reaching him), I should have made bold to write, to let him know the trouble we’ve got into on his account. But I didn’t like to try and find out at Deasmarsh; first, for fear he might think it was compensation I wanted;— but, most of all, from the great anxiety he always showed that nothing should be known in his family of his acquaintance with yourself.”

“ He was, indeed, always sadly in fear of discovery!” said Magdalen, with a desponding waive of the head.

“ Seeing which, I hadn’t heart to write. And now that Miss Matilda and her mamma

have ceased to set foot in the place, I've no longer no chance of hearing anything of him, no more than yourself. And rightly I'm served, God knows, for meddling and making in what I knew to be wrong, but hadn't the heart to refuse to the boy I'd dandled on my knee ! To be sure neither he, nor I, nor no one could give a guess how black matters would turn out, and to what wicked lies they'd give rise. Not on *your* account, Miss Magdalen, but your poor cousin's ; who lay senseless in this very room, on yonder bed, from only looking at the corpse :—little thinking, poor lamb, what evil thoughts her tenderheartedness was giving rise to : and how even her own flesh and blood, her own natural uncle, if natural he can be called—”

“ I thought,” interrupted a gruff voice, so near them as to cause both Mrs. Clemson and her guest to start and tremble, “ I thought, wife, I'd made my will plain understood as I wouldn't have no more young ladies a tam-

perin' under my roof?"—grumbled old Clemson, who had entered the room unobserved, attracted by the unusual sound of conversation within his doors. "Haven't we had trouble and shame enow already?"—

"Miss Cromer hasn't set foot in this house these six months, Thomas," pleaded the embarrassed wife.

"And bad's the luck she ever set foot in it at all!"—cried Clemson, striking his staff on the ground. "I don't want to think no harm o' no un, nor to say no harm o' no un. But whether the young lady have a right to look honest folks in the face, or whether she han't, if ever she darkens *my* doors again, I'd have her to know *my* leave'll be wantin'!"—

Though unable to divine the cause of his indignation, there scarcely needed this hint to hasten Magdalen from the house. Of her former visits to Deasmill, he had manifested no disapproval; and fifty murdered infants found in the Deas would not have instigated

a surmise in *her* mind that such an event could be connected by the wildest scandal-monger with her own name or her cousin's. But, on taking her trembling way across the lane back to her father's plantations, inexpressibly humiliated by the consciousness of expulsion from the spot to which she had been heretofore welcomed with reverence and affection, it occurred to her that, in spite of Mrs. Clemson's protestations, she might know more of the proceedings of Reresby than she chose to avow.

"It was for *his* sake, only, they were kind to me," murmured she; "and it is because aware that he has grown indifferent, they receive me thus roughly. Yes! even *he* has abandoned me;—and what now remains to comfort me for my breach of duty towards my parents, and the forfeiture of my self-respect?"—

Of the malicious rumours which had long caused her village-pensioners to look so sad,

and the old people whom she sometimes stopped by the way to inquire after their infirmities, to answer in blunt monosyllables, how was a being so innocent as Magdalen to conjecture the origin?—That the blackest suspicions rested upon her young cousin, and that the piece of silk found round the throat of the dead infant at Deasmill (having been recognized as the fragment of a handkerchief often seen in the hands of her brother Stephen,) pointed her out as the supposed confederate and accomplice of the guiltless Emma, was the last thing likely to reach her ears. And though a thousand trifles tended to substantiate the suspicions of the evil-minded of Deaswold,—the feud between the two brothers,—the enforced separation between the two cousins,—the devotions of the Cromer Hall family transferred to Basinghill as a security against any accidental encounter,—and finally the departure of the delinquent for London, unable longer to face the murmurs

of the parish,—to Magdalen, all this was as non-existent as, to an ordinary wanderer over the earth's surface, the unexplored mines under his feet.

In the despondency of her solitary grief, often did she pray for early death,—often wish that she was lying beside her sisters in a grave where those who had rejected and deserted her would never bend their careless way. The sight of Deasmarsh in all its brilliant sunshine of prosperity was becoming almost as hateful to *her* eyes as to those of her father. The name of Mordaunt sounded in her ears as that of an enemy. The thought of worldly riches became pain and grief to her; convinced that they had hardened against her the heart at one time so fondly her own. The denunciations of Scripture against the rich man rose unconsciously to her lips; and the worthy cotton-spinner who, if released from his engagements with the Freshleys and cognizant of her sincere affection for his son,

would have taken Magdalen to his heart as a daughter-in-law had she been the offspring of the Clemsons or the poorest cotter of Deaswold, instead of its lord of the manor, existed in her mind as a son of pride and perdition, predestined to the doom of Dives !—

Though the sullen enmity subsisting between Mr. Cromer and his prodigal son rendered their meals as taciturn as those of La Trappe, when the Squire occasionally broke silence to recount some new trait of prodigality on the part of the upstarts at Deasmarsh, Magdalen no longer uplifted her voice in gentle vindication,—no longer ventured to depreciate the sources of his information. Even when the traits cited by her father of Mordaunt's pomps and vanities were not only improbable, but impossible, she made no rash avowals of incredulity. If the story were devoid of foundation, the proverb saith truly that "People lend only to the rich."—Such things were asserted but of the Mordaunts !—

Sometimes, indeed, the better instincts of her gentle nature prevailed; and she reproached herself for being less grateful than she ought to the Providence which extended around her the vernal glory of the woods, and to her careworn heart rendered the still watches of the night so pure and holy and refreshing; and at such moments as these, with tears of tenderness streaming down her face, she found it difficult to refrain from addressing a few lines, at all risks, to Reresby, and telling him of all she was suffering for his sake. The prohibitions of his father had no authority over *her*. Better she should put her destiny to the proof. Better appeal to the candour of her affianced husband.—If forgotten, better know it at once!—Six more months of her present state of misery and suspense would be worse than death.

More than once had she beguiled the loneliness of her forlorn hours by inditing such a letter; and more than once had it been

hastily destroyed, in the compunctious dread of causing an unhappy moment to Reresby, by transgressing his interdiction. Even when, at last, one, longer and fonder and more explicit than all the rest, had been redeemed from destruction as incapable of provoking his displeasure, how was it to be conveyed to the post,—the letter-bag for which passed invariably through the hands of her father? For Magdalen was of too noble a turn of mind to have confidants among the servants; nor had she ever ascertained by whose hand the packet despatched by Mrs. Clemson was placed in her chamber.

On one point, however, still more difficult to decide than the transmission of her despatch, she had thoroughly made up her mind. To the uncle, whose goodness she so fully appreciated,—the uncle, who had comforted her at the trying moment of parting from her sisters—she would confide the difficulties of her situation the moment he re-

turned to the country. In spite of whatever vengeance might fall upon her, should her father discover that they had met, she would contrive an interview with the Rector. If his advice did not avail to clear up her way before her, at least his kindly word would give her strength to bear on to the end.

The very resolution to unbosom what weighed so heavily on her mind, seemed to afford relief; and, with a more cheerful countenance than she had worn for months, she accompanied her family, one evening, to one of those summer tea-drinkings at Basinghill Manor, which constituted the dissipations of Cromer Hall.

Her father, though he made a standing grievance of such visits, had accepted in the present instance the Miss Moulsey's invitation; the ill-terms on which he lived with his son placing him sadly in want of listeners on whom to vent the paroxysms of rabid animosity engendered by the progressive en-

franchisement of trade, and the defeats of the Protectionists. Aristobulus Settringham might be an ass. But if the enjoyment of a small attachéship in the eighteenth century entitled him to fancy himself a diplomat, the proprietorship of seventy acres of arable land sufficed to constitute him a champion of the corn-laws. The Squire felt that it would be a comfort to hear even so small a voice crying "Amen" to his diatribes against the uncourtly, gentlemanlike politics of Deasmarsh.

For, owing to the influence of the upstart cotton-spinner, meetings had been called in the district, and petitions signed, and all the screws and levers of the movement party brought into play.—Nay, according to the wild arraignment of the Squire, it was by *his* arguments the Lord Lieutenant had been seduced from his duty,—the county members converted from their opinions,—the people blinded,—the legislation deafened,—the world turned upside down. — The speech made by

Reresby Mordaunt, which all parties concurred in citing as a masterpiece of argument and oratory, the Squire did not hesitate to pronounce a Satanical inspiration, — a crocodile's egg laid in the sand by old Mordaunt, and brought to life by the fiendish incubation of his son.—

Scarcely had he patience to reply with fitting courtesy to the compliments of Miss Moulsey, or bestow the encomiums exacted by Miss Araminta on the brilliancy of her flower-beds,—so eager was he to seize Aristobulus by the button, and launch forth into the jeremiads to which the ears of his family had become as much accustomed as to the cawing of his rookery.

But alas ! for his powers of self-government, the man in whose density of intellect his soul trusted as companion with his own, had enlisted, at that epoch of sudden conversions, under the banner of the enemy !—Betwixt the Thursday morning and Friday night, the ar-

rival of his cousin Mr. Settringham from town, with tidings of the hopelessness of the cause to the skirts of which Aristobulus had pinned with a minnikin pin his very diminutive adhesion, had sufficed to enlist him among those *gros bataillons* which Providence is said to favour!—

When Aristobulus adverted, in answer to one of Mr. Cromer's explosions of wrath against the advocates of Corn-law emancipation, to the luminous speech of the young member for Castle Dangan, he probably calculated on the impunity of being housed on the ground-floor, with windows opening to the lawn:—so pugnacious was the attitude and so defying the countenance of the Squire.

“The truth is, my dear ma'am,” continued the ex-diplomat, turning, secure of their suffrage, towards the two spinsters with whose affections he was accustomed to trifle alternately, like Horace Walpole with others of higher note,—“we must take the colour of

our opinions from the times we live in.—We must not seek our political principles in our own pockets. — We must not point to a rent-roll for the exposition of a creed. — We must look to the convictions of the country, the *necessities* of the country! — The dumb have been taught to speak, — and the deaf must be made to hear. — Reluctantly, therefore, but with conscientious self-abnegation, I trample my interests under foot, and proclaim myself a Free trader.” —

A mere paraphrase of the words of Reresby Mordaunt! — And yet the two spinsters in whose sight Deasmarsh and its inhabitants were an abomination, misled by habitual deference to the infallibility of their village Pope, kept nodding approval with hands and head, like a couple of China mandarins.

“ I am not altogether hopeless, my dear Mr. Cromer,” added Aristobulus, turning with an air of magnanimous superiority towards the Squire — “ of seeing you become a conver

to our cause. — I find from my cousin that young Mordaunt has already made proof of his eloquence, by bringing round to his opinions *one* member of your family.” —

Already bursting with rage, to find himself lumped with his brother the parson appeared the unkindest cut of all ! And so desirous was the Squire to convey his sentiments of disgust at the liberty taken with him by such a junction in the strongest and most comprehensive words, that, baulked by his ambition, he said nothing. —

“ Settringham informs me,” added Aristobulus, taking advantage of his “fix,” “that he met our friend Jacob repeatedly in town ; though, from my previous knowledge of your quiet brother, I confess I never should have suspected him of frequenting the chaos worse confounded which my well-beloved cousin is pleased to call the world of letters.” —

“ And Miss Emma ? ” — inquired Araminta Moulsey, regardless of the indignation that

appeared to be working like barm in the bosom of the Squire.

“ Oh ! Miss Emma,—to the honour of her luck or her discernment,” — added Aristobulus facetiously,— “ has drawn the *gros lot*,—the thirty thousand pounds prize.—It appears that young Mordaunt, who is now one of the stars of the day, never leaves her side.—The young couple afe inseparable.”—

“ I guessed as much !” — cried the Squire, concentrating his long-repressed wrath into a single explosion,—“ I guessed it from the cold-blooded effrontery with which my brother denied the existence of any understanding between them,—and the girl herself rebutted my charge of having met the unprincipled scamp secretly at Deasmill !”—

“ *At Deasmill ?*” — reiterated the two spinsters and their weazened beau,—for whom, as for all the neighbourhood, the very name of that ill-starred spot had acquired a lugubrious significance.—

“ Ay—last autumn, — day after day, — in the deserted mill ! ” — cried Mr. Cromer, almost incoherent from passion. — “ The very place where my brother or his daughter hit upon the body of a murdered child ! — But, as others besides myself remarked on the occasion, ‘ those who hide can find. ’ ”

“ My dear Mr. Cromer,” argued his wife in a tone of plaintive remonstrance—“ you forget that Magdalen is present ! ” —

Not more, however, than the rest of the party had forgotten it ! — And when, on Mrs. Cromer’s hint, the elder of the two spinsters turned towards the window near which Magdalen had placed herself, as if to inhale the fragrance of a flower-garden as choice as the flower-gardens of spinsters are apt to be, to beg she would draw her chair nearer to the tea-table, — a loud exclamation drew the attention of all present towards the poor girl who, speechless and pale as ashes, sat as if stricken with palsy.

By Araminta and her sister, not a little shocked at the indiscreet allusions which the Squire had hazarded in their presence so as to "break the good meeting with most admired disorder," her sudden indisposition was naturally attributed to horror at hearing her cousin Emma so cruelly spoken of.—

"Poor girl, —poor girl!"—whispered they —after hartshorn, ether, and sal-volatile had been offered without producing the smallest effect in restoring colour to her cheek or meaning to her eye;—"she is too delicate and tender-hearted to be dealt with after justice-room fashion!—But Mr. Cromer is a sadly coarse-minded man. —Mr. Cromer was never intended by Providence for contact with the more delicate sex!"—

And as soon as the carriage, re-ordered in haste, had conveyed away the tyrant and the tyrannized, Aristobulus, flattering himself that conviction rather than indignation had produced the silence of the out-argued

Squire, added with a conscious smile that, "If unfitted by nature for female society, his worthy neighbour the Squire was quite as little qualified for contact with men of cultivated understanding,—extensive information,—and knowledge of the world. Mr. Cromer, for instance, would never have been a moment tolerated in the responsible and noble vocation of a diplomatic career!"—

And mechanically, the long-practised echoes of Basinghill Cottage replied—"the responsible and noble vocation of a diplomatic career!"—

CHAPTER XXI.

—— With pleasures too refin'd to please,
With too much spirit to be e'er at ease,
With too much quickness ever to be taught,
With too much thinking to have common thought,
Purchasing pain with all that joy can give,
She dies of nothing but the rage to live.

POPE.

The heir-apparent of Settringham Abbey, too dull a man not to see clearly and report with exactness, had told nothing but the truth. Every time he was in company in London with his Northamptonshire neighbours, he had noticed Reresby Mordaunt and Emma engaged in earnest conversation.

For no sooner had the warm-hearted girl wrought upon him to avow the sincerity of his devotion to her cousin, than the generosity

of her heart thawed like a well-spring at the first genial gleam of Spring. A few earnest words of explanation on both sides led to an expansion of mutual confidence; and those who, at one time had narrowly risked becoming lovers, became readily friends.—

The affectionate enthusiasm with which Emma spoke of his cousin tended to the revival of impressions in some little danger of becoming obliterated by the all-effacing tides and currents of London engagements; and, on seeing him really and deeply affected by her picture of Magdalen's position at Cromer Hall, the spirit of the worthy Jacob broke forth in his daughter, and she pledged herself to take an early opportunity, on her return to Deaswold, to explain all to her cousin, and satisfy her how truly she was beloved.

On learning, however, from Reresby the strenuousness of Mr. Mordaunt's opposition to the match, she rescinded her first proposal that her

father should be taken into their councils. Emma was aware that the Rector considered it essential to the well-being of his parish that he should remain on friendly terms with his powerful parishioner ; and it would have been hardly fair to embroil them, in order to promote the interests of the lovers. Time enough, at all events, to take the good parson into their confidence, after ascertaining from Magdalen whether there existed the smallest hope of reconciliation between the Rectory and Hall !—

There was consequently some ground for the parental uneasiness with which Jacob Cromer noted the progress of an intimacy which he regarded only as a second sowing of the tares he had been at so much pains to eradicate. To what purpose his journey to town, if he were fated to take back to Deaswold a doubly-repining daughter !—

Unspeakable was the vexation with which he watched the manœuvres of the widow of

the late celebrated to get her niece invited to Lady Belvedere and chaperoned by Lady Madrepore, for the sole purpose of being placed in the way of Reresby Mordaunt ;—but, debarred by gratitude for her kindness towards his daughter from remonstrating with all the unction he would fain have exercised, she contrived to have her own way.

“ The Countess of Belvedere may be a little flighty,” said she, in answer to his arguments. “ But she is a woman not only of the highest rank and fashion but the highest influence; and, should our dear Emma marry and settle in town, will be of the greatest service in introducing her into society.”

In vain did the good man protest against the likelihood of such an alliance as she foresaw ; in vain assure her that, if married, her husband would be the person to establish his daughter suitably in the world.—The prim little widow drew so largely upon her stock

of plausibility to convince him that it was the duty of her only sister's widower to submit to her guidance in matters concerning the worldly welfare of her niece, that, with a heavy sigh, he consented to her being hooked for a single evening to the wing of the curiosity-monger.

It is true that, when dressed for Lady Belvedere's party and her countenance animated by the hope that she was about to assist in securing the happiness of the cousin she loved so dearly, Emma looked so much prettier and happier than he had seen her for the last twelve months, that the fond father almost forgot his scruples. Moreover, the day was now fixed for their return to the country; and though the idea of home wore a less smiling aspect than heretofore, the Rector armed himself against all unpleasant impressions by a determination that, once more alone with his daughter, he would overlook the feelings of delicacy which had determined

him to await her voluntary confidence; and come to such explanations with her on the subject of Deasmarsh and its heir, as must remove the burthen of cares under which he was labouring.

“We who love each other so truly,” mused he, when the carriage containing his heart’s treasure had driven from the door,—“we, who are all in all to each other, and but little I fear to the rest of our fellow-creatures, —should be unpardonable if, for want of the courage to appeal to each other’s feelings, we allowed clouds to obscure the perfect confidence that ought to exist between father and child.”—

Had Emma, on the other hand, surmised that she was included in Lady Madrepore’s invitation to the *soirée* in Belgrave Square only to gratify the curiosity of a whimsical Countess, her pride (not the Cromer pride of belonging to “an old county family,” but the pride of petulant girlhood) would have

prevented her accepting the invitation. But, thoughtless as she was warm-hearted, it occurred to *her* as little that her intimacy with Reresby could provoke the jealousy of his fashionable friends, as that it could excite the anxieties of her father; and the pleasure of finding herself in the midst of the most brilliant assemblage she had seen in London, —an assemblage differing as widely from the grotesque and solemn coterie of the widow of the “late celebrated” as the brilliant flower-beds of Chiswick from the herbary of the physic garden at Chelsea,—so brightened her young and lovely face, that there was some pretext for the swelling nostril and curling lip with which the jealous hostess observed how coolly, (immediately after her entrance and the ceremonies of introduction,) the protégée of Lady Madrepore took the arm of the Honourable member for Castle Dangan, and disappeared with him into the refreshment-room.—

“ Paired off for the remainder of the session !” — observed Sir Herbert Glynne, an amused spectator of his noble cousin’s astonishment.—“ For a country-girl, the *coup de main* is really not *amiss* !” —

“ I thought I understood her to be a Miss Cromer ?” — observed Lord Richard Lovell, who was standing by and seldom understood things but by halves.

“ At all events, a very pretty girl,” echoed his Shadow, rightly interpreting the look of admiration with which Lord Richard was following with his eyes the buoyant movements of the happy girl.—And on seeing her and Reresby courteously accosted by the Grovynor Grovynors whom they met by the way, the young Lord and his Shadow decided that the pretty girl with the brown ringlets and hazel eyes was a Northamptonshire belle, and therefore the country-neighbourhood perquisite of young Mordaunt.—

“ Paired, but not matched, you think ?” —

resumed Sir Herbert, aside to Lady Belvedere, as soon as the two young men had sauntered off for a nearer inspection of that which is hailed with such joy in one of the dead calms of fashionable life,—a new face, and a personage *sans antécédens*.—" *Que voulez vous !* —Birds of brightest plumage,—pheasant, peacock, or hoppo,—are addicted to the homeliest mates!—Do you remember, my dear Lady Bel., when you first desired me to present my friend Mordaunt to you, my telling you that he had a foible for a rustic Perdita?"—

But the handsome Countess had become too experienced in the part of Ariadne, to allow her chagrin to become visible;—more especially to one possessed of so mocking a tongue as her cousin Herbert. Like most attractive women subject to no control but that of her whims and fancies, Lady Belvedere never trusted to the reality of her prepossession till the object of her preference had

escaped her. An object of general admiration, *l'embarras du choix* neutralized her privilege of election. So small was the share of the affections in influencing her conduct, and so much more dependant were her predilections on the choice of society than on her own, that, on her guard against the deceptions of a momentary vogue or usurped reputation, she could not concentrate on a single object those fascinations which, had warmth of feeling been compatible with their superficial charm, would have been indeed irresistible.

The foresight of her vanity inspired her with mistrust. Her dread of being disenchanted on the morrow, rendered her incapable of enjoying to-day. *Less* beautiful—*less* gifted,—*less* opulent, she would also have been less self-secure, and consequently more susceptible of lasting impressions.—But, amid the triumphs of her brilliant existence, she was one of the many destined to flutter

their way through the coquetries of successive seasons, — hurrying onwards to warm herself in the beams of a setting sun, till twilight apprized her that it was too late.—

Lord Fauconberg, who, for a time, had flattered himself of having encaged the Phoenix, and created a real attachment in her heart, had broken his chain with the firm energy of a high-minded man, on discovering that his devotedness was insufficient to prevent her wandering eye and rapacious vanity from straying in pursuit of the political lion of the day ; and Reresby himself, who, though circumstances rendered impossible any pretension to her hand, had been dazzled for a moment by the distinctions accorded him in Belgrave Square, no sooner saw her deserted by Lord Fauconberg, than the charm that seemed to invest her when honoured by the preference of one of the first men of the day, disappeared in a moment. Like the maiden in the goblin tale, who, by the sudden with-

drawal of the talisman which endows her with the semblance of life, becomes reconverted into a mass of clay, he turned from her almost with loathing.—To be abandoned by Lord Fauconberg, was a sufficient certificate of demerit.

“*Ainsi va le monde !*” mused Sir Herbert, when, in spite of the calls both on her courtesy and coquetry, as the hostess of so brilliant a circle, he saw his beautiful cousin have recourse to her *flacon*, her gorgeous fan à la Louis XIV., and a handkerchief adorned with filmy lace, to disguise the irritation of mind which *she* conceived to be tender emotion, produced by witnessing Reresby’s degradation :—

the eagle, in its pride of place,

Thus by a mousing owl stooped at and killed.

“ Another of the gorgeous glasses of fashion’s magic lantern irretrievably cracked ! —Alas ! poor Lady Bel.—If, instead of wasting the best years of her life in moonraking, she

had fallen into the hands of a husband possessing common sense and uncommon good temper, what a charming woman might she have made!"

While still watching the incoherent words and gestures into which his noble kinswoman was betrayed by her desire to ascertain what was going on in the other room, he found himself suddenly harpooned by Lady Madrepore.

"Tell me, I entreat you, dear Sir Herbert," whispered she, in the most mysterious manner,—“you who are *l'ami de la maison*,—*which* is the great man!”—

“*What* great man? — Lord William Apreece, who was refused as too tall for the Life-Guards?”

“Don't be so provoking;—*you* know very well who I mean! Everybody, I find, is in the secret;—though he goes about in plain clothes, and would not dine with Lord Aberdeen lest he should be suspected.”—

“Perhaps you would not object to tell me in plain words the name of the gentleman in plain clothes?”

“That is exactly what we are all dying to find out!—This is the first party he has been to. Lady Belvedere, who ought to take out a patent for getting proofs of everything and everybody *avant la lettre*, bespoke him before he landed!”—

Certain that, if time were allowed her, the wonder-monger would by degrees unravel her clue of rigmarole, Sir Herbert was not long in finding out that she had been made the object of a hoax. Cad Rowlandson, a chatterbox nearly as flighty as herself, had persuaded her that the lion of Lady Belvedere’s party was a renegade Jesuit, an accredited spy of the Sultan, who had been despatched to London on a secret mission to keep watch over the proceedings of Ibrahim Pasha; and scarcely a man present whose face happened to be strange to her, and sufficiently mahogany

of complexion to avouch an Oriental origin, but was exposed to the annoyance of her scrutiny.

At length, having fixed, as the hero of her romance, upon a Brazilian *chargé d'affaires* sufficiently dun of visage to warrant the supposition that he was in the habit of taking baths of chocolate, she hurried off in search of her protégée, to communicate the discovery she had made ; followed by Sir Herbert, not a little curious to hear the revisals and emendations she would make in her second edition of the story. Nor did the air of satisfaction with which she detected Emma and Reresby Mordaunt seated together in a niche of a vestibule opening to the refreshment-room, escape his observation.

“ Conceive what an interesting creature we have here to-night, my dear Mr. Mordaunt !” cried she, pushing forward to accost them. “ A young Jesuit, in whom the late pope had such confidence, that he was despatched by

his order to Constantinople as a missionary ; where, instead of converting others, he became converted in his turn ; but, from his origin, he was so much an object of suspicion among the Turks, that his only chance of securing his neck against the bowstring, was by becoming the accredited spy of the Seraglio!—Russia and Turkey, as I need not tell you, my dear Mr. Mordaunt, possess a *diplomatie secrète* of *mouchards*, in addition to their *corps diplomatique accrédité* ; and this Père Egidius (or, as he is called by the Mussulmans, Hassan Habaddon) has been secretly despatched to England, to protect the interests of the Porte against the intrigues of the Viceroy of Egypt.”

“ By Jove, she shall edit my next romance ! ” muttered Sir Herbert, scarcely able to refrain from complimenting Lady Madrepore outright on her genius for amplification. “ I no longer wonder,” was his secret reflection on the redundancy of her ladyship’s organs of

invention, "that naked Truth is forced to hide herself in a well, since Lying presents herself in such flowing robes!"—

"Have you any commissions for Northamptonshire, Sir Herbert?" inquired Emma, while Reresby was proceeding to cross-examine Lady Madrepore. "We are on the eve of returning to Deaswold."

And the frank and cheerful manner in which she addressed him, so satisfied him that the country girl was not altogether spoiled by the tinsel and varnish of London life, that he instantly took a seat by her side; and entered as freely into conversation as in those unlucky days at Deasmarsh, when their intimacy excited the anxieties of Matilda.

"And do you not apprehend," said he, "that Deaswold will appear somewhat weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable to eyes that have been feasting upon *pas de déesses*, and ears accustomed to be tickled by Jullien and Herr Koenig?"

"On the contrary," was Emma's honest reply. "Home has gained astonishingly in my estimation by my peep at London! Here, one must be one of the privileged few, to enjoy oneself; whereas, country pleasures are open to all. It is only by especial favour I am the guest of Lady Belvedere to-night. But two days hence, I shall be enjoying the glorious summer sunshine in the midst of the woods and fields, and thanks to no one!"—

"Pride, pride, pride!" ejaculated Sir Herbert, (not venturing to quote the apostrophe of Milton's Satan, containing a monosyllable not to be lightly named to "ears polite") "pride, the perdition of the country, as vanity of the town!"—

"No, indeed," replied Emma, blushing at finding the finger-post of detection pointed towards her besetting sin: "I have only learned, by privation, the value of the precious hours and pleasant liberty which, at

Deaswold, had become too habitual to be appreciated."

"I do not wonder that you have learned to see new charms in Northamptonshire," rejoined Sir Herbert, with a significant glance at Reresby. "You have been studying under an instructor deeply interested in your enlightenment."

"Deeply indeed!" retorted Emma, unable to control an arch smile at seeing even the shrewd Sir Herbert so completely what Lord Richard Lovell would have called "sold and sent home;" or to resist the desire of retaliating, by an allusion to his own flirtations of yore. "But, considering that I have seen *you* submitted to tuition scarcely less partial, your affection for Deaswold and its environs does not exhibit itself by *very* frequent visits."

A sharp pang for a moment impeded the utterance of Sir Herbert!—Had Emma been aware how deeply-seated were the feelings of

resentment which kept him away from Deasmarsh, she would have hazarded no mention of the subject. But, like others, she was deceived by the liveliness of Sir Herbert Glynné's manners into the belief that he was a *mere* man of the world.

“Considering how strong and how effectively the *sexre peu beau* musters in your part of the county,” said he, as soon as he was able to command his voice and spirits sufficiently for jesting,—“I am surprised you should have found occasion to note my absence. Have you not my friend Settringham, whom I saw the other night in a stall at the Opera, as brown and withered as a Normandy pippin, listening to Castellan through his double glasses; and, in the self-complacency of his duncehood, declaring that Grisi grows younger and younger every year?—Have you not the man-in-buckram, his cousin Abdolumus—(what’s the old diplomat’s name?) who used to write ‘private and confidential’

on his cards of invitation?—I say nothing of my friend Reresby, or of the lively son and heir of the house of Melfont,—seeing that they are bespoken!”—

“Sacred be the secrets of your friend Reresby,” rejoined Emma, glancing at the victim still writhing in the clutches of Lady Madrepore with an audacity which Sir Herbert indignantly attributed to the pernicious lessons of a London season. “But, as regards Mr. Melfont, I fear it will be some time before Lady Madrepore obtains possession of the tiles from Persepolis she has commissioned him to add to her museum, on his return from the East.”

“Melfont—George Melfont—uprooted from his native clay, and become a wanderer like the rest of us?”—cried Sir Herbert, startled out of all self-possession. “I should as soon have expected to hear of the expatriation of the Duke of York’s Column!”—

“*Homme propose, femme dispose!*” re-

plied Emma shrugging her shoulders. "One of the painters of the day is said to have scraped to pieces one of the pictures of the old masters, in hopes to discover the secret of their colouring."

"And whom has Melfont been scraping?—His lady-mother, I hope!—I never saw a façade in greater need of new pointing!"—

"I mean," said Emma, piqued at what she conceived to be his wilful misconception, "that, after asking himself in vain what could be the superior merit in Sir Herbert Glynné inducing Miss Mordaunt to prefer him to a peerage, Melfont Park, and a rent-roll that would reach from hence to Cadogan Place, he at length decided it to be the enlightenment produced by much travel.—So he has even saddled his camel like the rest of you."—

"This is the most extraordinary story!" said Herbert, in an altered voice. "But no!—I see how it is!—You are making just

such an example of my credulity as Cad Rowlandson of that of your chaperon !”—

“ You would not say so, had you called with papa and I, ten days ago, in Queen Anne Street, and seen poor dear Lady Melfont supervising the preparations for the exile of her fattened calf: the remedies for ophthalmia, the antidotes to venomous bites, the air cushions and Macintoshed tubs which were gathering together against the departure of the Overland Mail ! ”—

“ And you mean that he is actually gone ? ”

“ Actually gone.—Lord Melfont returned from Southampton, two days since, after seeing him off.”

“ Strange,” observed Sir Herbert, though more to himself than to his companion, “ that Reresby should never have mentioned the subject to me ! ”—

“ I suspect it is a sore one to the whole family,” rejoined Emma, taking the remark to herself. “ Anxious as they were that Miss

Mordaunt should relent in Mr. Melfont's favour, because convinced that the marriage would assure her happiness, it must have been provoking enough to see her again and again refuse an alliance which would have settled her in their immediate neighbourhood at once and for ever."—

"There certainly were strong reasons for Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt's forwarding the match," said Sir Herbert, becoming suddenly candid and liberal, on ascertaining that parental persuasion had effected nothing towards the establishment of George Melfont's pretensions. "It was but natural they should prefer having her within their reach in Northamptonshire, to running the risk of a residence in Ireland!"—

"A residence in Ireland?—What a horrible alternative!" cried Emma, far from suspecting the drift of his logic. "But who ever talked of her going to Ireland?—Who ever *thought* of her going to Ireland?"—

Sir Herbert accused himself, of course, of being unpardonably absent ; and expressed a sort of blundering belief that Lord Melfont possessed estates in the sister island :—" and as fathers are apt to settle on their sons when they marry," continued he, " the house they find damp or the estates they consider least eligible, I was stupid enough to fancy that the noble couple capable of residing in Queen Anne Street might condemn their heir apparent to Tipperary."

Luckily for the credit of his veracity, the colloquy between Lady Madrepore and Reresby was interrupted by Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor's fidgeting up to the Honourable Member for Castle Dangan, to inquire the name and address of a detector-lock manufacturer, whose handiworks she had admired at Deasmarsh, and was eager to recommend to the notice of Ibrahim Pacha ; seeing that, by dint of half an hour's severe study, removing the key fifty times, and manœuvring

it in a hundred different ways, a certainty was obtained that any human being unpossessed of similar patience and memory, and ingenuity enough to go through all the details of the process, would be debarred from reading the letters or making off with the valuables which all this locking and counter-locking and relocking purported to render safe as the Crown jewels in the Tower.

For, while her ladyship was informing herself with much questioning of what a glance at the "London Directory" would have certified in a moment, Lady Madrepore, devoid of all interest in such works of nature or art as were uncalculated to figure within the glass case of a museum, fastened herself once more on her *protégée*; and Sir Herbert, as thoroughly transformed in nature since he entered the room as a crysalis transmuted into a butterfly, could scarcely restrain his spirits within decent bounds, while enjoying his favourite sport of applying the magnifying glass to her absurdities.

He rendered her the happiest of women by presenting to her as the Mahomedanized Jesuit the unfortunate Don Manoëlo, who became the most puzzled of men by her mysterious allusions to his secret vocation, and her hints that in the rotund form of Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor he beheld one of the overgrown beauties of Ibrahim;—and had not Emma, the business of whose evening was now despatched, expressed a wish to escape from the heated throng, where “man delighted her not nor woman either,” the news of George Melfont’s intended introduction to the Plagues of Egypt (more intoxicating to Sir Herbert Glynne than a whole case of Champagne!) might have betrayed him into extravagance beyond the toleration of his noble cousin and her guests.

CHAPTER XXII.

No might nor greatness in mortality
Can censure 'scape; back-wounding calumny
The whitest virtue strikes. What thing so strong
Can tie the gall up of a sland'rous tongue!

SHAKESPEARE.

“How beautiful, how refreshing!” exclaimed Emma to her father, as they were borne homeward the following day, by the wings of steam, through woods and valleys that seemed to revive them as by a bath of verdure, after the stony desert of the great metropolis.—

“Refreshing indeed!”—echoed the Rector. “I account it first among the blessings of Providence to be fated to lead a country life,—a destiny that renders it both easier to live, and easier to die.”—

There was some pretext for their expansion of feeling. To escape the fuss, and fidget, and much ado about nothing of Lady Barton's establishment, was a relief in itself; and the country, in its brightest effulgence of mid-summer glories, appeared to their eager eyes as if tricked out for a fête.—The gardens and fields were so full of flowers,—the plains, so loaded with produce,—the air so fragrant,—the waters so limpid,—that Nature seemed to be holding her court, and outshining in her raiment, wrought about with divers colours, the embroidered mantle of kings.

“Even misery does not look so wretched in the country,” added Emma, as they traversed a cheerful hamlet embedded in elder-bushes, “as under the clouds of smoke that choke the lungs of the Londoners, in their gloomy courts and stifling workrooms.”—

And when at length they reached the station of Darley Level, and discerned the beautiful woods of Deasmarsh dotting the

hills, both father and daughter exclaimed once more in the fullness of their hearts—
“how beautiful,—how refreshing!”—

The green vistas of Mr. Mordaunt's park,—the distant glitter of the Deas,—the cheerful aspect of the well-detached stone mansion-house,—and, above all, the air of comfort and prosperity diffused over the place and its inhabitants,—appeared to strike Emma as for the first time, on winding along the road leading from the Station to the Rectory.

“Don't you think, papa,” said she, as though her mind were giving a loose to pleasant anticipations,—“don't you think that a woman must be indeed hard to please if, able to live and die at Deasmarsh, she sighed after London pleasures?”—

And the tone of exultation in which she spoke, while looking forward to the happiness of her cousin Magdalen, which in the romantic fervour of her disposition she fancied about to be secured by her interposition,

induced a hope on the part of her father that, now they were about to be alone together again in the country, she would lose no time in opening her heart. But so completely did she appear to be giving way to her feelings, that he determined, should she again relapse into reserve, to surmount his reluctance ; and afford her those paternal warnings and monitions of which she stood so much in need. He dreaded the thoughts of standing face to face with Mordaunt, so long as, by shrinking from a full explanation with Emma, he had not placed himself aloof from the confederacy of the young people.—

The welcome to the country afforded him by his wealthy neighbour, served to double his compunctious visitings. The hearty salutations of Mordaunt, or rather the salutations which, instead of being hearty, as formerly, were almost affectionate, touched to the quick the heart of the Rector. — For *he* did not perceive that an inflexion of pity

modulated the voice of his friendly neighbour.

Before the proprietor of Deasmarsh had been twenty minutes in the Rectory parlour, however, his manner completely altered.—Not because his friend Jacob appeared so ill at ease as to call for some exertion of cheerfulness to relieve his embarrassment. Not because Jacob's daughter made her appearance, bright and smiling as when he first beheld her in that very room, looking like a new-blown flower in a spring morning. But because the political questions, which he expressly avoided canvassing from a desire to eschew strife with a neighbour so respected, were frankly approached by the Rector. Satisfied of the conscientious motive of his conversion to more liberal principles than those which, like parasites, clung to the family-tree of the Cromers which they rendered barren by their prurient growth, he had no fear that his honesty would be mistrusted by an honest man.—

But though Jacob candidly avowed his change of opinion to have been produced by an examination of the position and necessities of the country unwarped by the personal and professional bias of which it was less easy to divest himself at home, attributing the enlargement of his views to the arguments of a variety of first-rate men, independent in mind and condition, with whom he had latterly come in contact,—Mr. Mordaunt felt as convinced as though the fact had passed under his eyes, that it was by Reresby alone the conversion of his worthy neighbour had been effected; that, though Leaguers and Chartists had spouted and pamphletized in vain, and a potato panic conspired with the Houynhim eloquence of the handicap Chatham to disgust him with the tenets and advocates of monopoly, it had needed but a touch of the skilful scalpel of Reresby to relieve him from his strabismus.

In the joy of his paternal triumph, there-

fore, Mordaunt forgot the compassionate impulses which had suggested his early visit to the Rectory.—A flush of joy rose to his face. His eye brightened. His heart became as light as a feather,—(as light as Emma's,—who could scarcely contain her spirits at finding herself once more her own mistress in her own home, the trusted delegate from one so highly regarded to another so much beloved !) In the elation of his soul, he could talk of nothing but London,—the young member for Castle Dangan,—the golden opinions he had won,—and the bright career awaiting him ;—till poor Jacob was fain to walk to the open window, and conceal, by staring out upon his new-mown lawn, his embarrassing sense of the sad disappointment awaiting this ambitious father.

“ And what day will you fix to come and dine at Deasmarsh, my dear young lady ? ” said the happy man, how little suspecting the origin of Jacob's chagrin !—“ The sooner the

better! Our neighbours are most of them still in town; so that we have nothing to offer you, just now, likely to satisfy a London belle. But my wife and daughter will rejoice to see you again; and I have a world of parish business to talk over with your father.”—

An invitation so friendly could be accepted only in the same cordial spirit; and, with a heavy heart, did the Rector find himself crossing once more the threshold and sharing the bread and salt of the man towards whom he fancied himself playing the part of Judas.

All the pleasure of traversing that beautiful domain, which he regarded with the partial eye of one who, having watched the unpromising child of a friend expand into beauty or manliness, sympathizes in his parental pride,—all the satisfaction of gazing upon so exquisite a combination of woods and waters, and flowers such as paradise may have rejoiced in,—was lost in the guilty feeling

that he was tacitly included in a conspiracy against his friend!—

It struck him, indeed, (though the suspicion might perhaps arise from the morbid state of his own feelings) that the countenance and manner of Mordaunt were already a little changed towards him since the preceding day. His welcome, if not less kind, was *different* from what he expected. There was an air of concern and embarrassment on the part of his host, for which he found it hard to account. To Emma, more particularly, the formality of his greeting was unmistakeable.

Not that *she* appeared conscious of any want of cordiality. The coldness of Mrs. Mordaunt and Matilda appeared of small consequence to one who had now discovered that the steeple of her village was not a landmark for the earth: that there were places and people, among whom Deasmarsh and the Mordaunts were of as small account as the com-

munity of an ant-hill, and in whose regard Deaswold Rectory enjoyed higher consideration.—The inconsistency with which their favour towards her had varied as with the mutability of a weather-glass, had diminished, moreover, their value in her eyes. For capricious people never inspire respect;—and so little in common with those of her father were her feelings in revisiting the once-loved spot, that she exulted in her advantage over them as the depositary of Reresby's secret.

The brilliancy of her smiles and newly-acquired *à plomb* of her manner, were of course attributed by Matilda and her mother to the self-conceit engendered by her London triumphs. Her incidental allusions to her recent pleasures seemed intended to apprise them that the daughter of their parish priest had been welcomed into circles, from which the family of Mordaunt, the cotton-spinner, would have been excluded; and though she

spoke of "my aunt, Lady Barton," only when it was indispensable, the name recurred in her anecdotes often enough to give offence.

When, in reply to Mrs. Mordaunt's measured and embarrassed inquiry whether Miss Cromer had lately seen her son, Emma answered with audacious glibness, "Oh, yes!—he put me into the carriage only three nights ago, after a very pleasant party at Lady Belvedere's in Belgrave Square," the indignation of both mother and daughter was completed by the coolness with which she added, "You probably know Lady Belvedere by name,—as she is the cousin of your friend Sir Herbert Glynnne?"—

"The name of Lady Belvedere is very generally known," was the ceremonious rejoinder of Mrs. Mordaunt; who appeared so little to encourage the conversation, that Emma turned towards the daughter to add, "Sir Herbert was, of course, at the party in Belgrave Square; and, finding I was about to return

home, charged me with a thousand compliments to Deasmarsh."

The vivid colour which, at this allusion, overspread the fine face of Matilda Mordaunt, proved that, in *her* estimation, it added insult to injury. A juster appreciation of Emma's frank and earnest character might have satisfied her that, had her suspicions of Sir Herbert's defection been just, his name would never have escaped the lips of her rival. But, in her present perverse mood, convinced by Emma's insolent liveliness that the purpose of her sojourn in town was accomplished, that her wedding clothes were in progress, and that nothing but a special license was wanting to convert her into Lady Glynne, of Glynne Manor,—she could scarcely summon courage for even the monosyllables occasionally necessary in reply to her sallies.

Far other, however, far, *far* more serious, was the origin of the abstraction of mind that rendered Mr. Mordaunt's exposition to the

Rector of justice and vestry business transacted since his departure, so different from his usual lucidity!—The customary clearness of his mind and consistency of his reasoning, seemed blurred into unaccountable confusion; and his poor conscience-stricken guest, after vainly endeavouring to comprehend what was incomprehensible, sat watching in secret consternation for some sudden explosion of the smothered feelings that were thus distracting his soul. No unusual demonstration, however, occurred: and the affectionate manner in which the hand of the Rector was wrung at parting by his host, served to prove that, whatever might be Mordaunt's suspicions concerning the attachment of his son, the father of its object had no share in his displeasure.

The usually firm and serene mind of Mordaunt was, in fact, so disturbed, that, at present, he had scarcely determined on whom his displeasure ought to fall.

An interview had been asked of him that

morning by young Milnward, preparatory to his departure from Deaswold ; which, concluding it to be a farewell visit of acknowledgment for hospitalities received during the preceding six weeks, was granted without a thought. But from the distressed countenance and embarrassed air with which his visitor entered the room, Mordaunt saw at once that some matter of deeper moment must be in agitation. He was, in fact, compelled to exhort him, more than once, to explain the motives of his visit, ere the young man, so calm and clear in the pulpit, could overcome the emotions under which he laboured.

“ It would be difficult for me to express, sir,” he began, “ the mental struggle against which I have been contending for some days past, as to the propriety of waiting upon you before I quit this place, to relieve my mind from a grievous burthen under which it is labouring ; or whether, at all risks, to address

myself to Mr. Cromer. But though I conceive the parental tenderness of both to be equally deep seated, I conceive that the father of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt should be of the two the better qualified to support—”

“ For mercy’s sake, my dear sir,” cried Mordaunt, drawing his chair close to his visitor the moment he found that the matter in agitation regarded his son, “ no apologies, no circumlocution!—What is the matter!—Speak out!—I can bear anything better than suspense!”

“ You can scarcely have failed to perceive, sir,” resumed Milnward, a little more articulately, though still with hesitation, “ that, for some time past, a less respectful feeling than could be desired towards our excellent friend, Mr. Cromer, has prevailed at Deaswold?”

“ Towards the Rector?—I can’t say I have noticed anything of the kind!” cried Mordaunt, becoming less excited as soon as

the interest of the case seemed to shift itself to other shoulders than those of Reresby.

“Not when, three weeks ago, the church was nearly deserted on occasion of his doing duty?” inquired Milnward, gathering self-possession when he found his face and words less anxiously watched by the person he was addressing.

“I vaguely remember that the congregation was a thin one,” replied his host. “But *that* might arise from caprice. The parishioners, perhaps, prefer a younger preacher.”

“No, sir. Many of those who absented themselves were ashamed to look their pastor in the face, after the bitterness with which they had been canvassing his conduct, while others were desirous of marking, in the only way in their power, their personal disapproval of it.”—

“Why, what has my friend Jacob been doing?” inquired Mordaunt, beginning to hope that the mental consternation of his

young visitor would bring forth only, like the mountain in labour, a *ridiculus mus*.—

“Were I required to point out a human being in this world free from speck or blemish, it would be the worthy Rector of Deaswold.”—

“And you would do justly!” cried young Milnward with warmth. “For there does not breathe a better Christian, a better man.”

“In which conviction,” resumed Mordaunt, “I confess I see nothing very afflicting in the defection of a few grumbling old blockheads; who, if St. Paul himself were to come and preach the gospel among them, would be trying to pick holes in his doctrines.”

“It is not the *doctrines*, sir, of Mr. Cromer, with which the parish pretends to find fault,” resumed Milnward.

“With what else, then,—since his conduct is irreproachable?”

“*That*, sir, is the point in dispute. If blameless himself, he is accused of screening

the misdeeds of others :—and it is the serious apprehension I entertain that this charge may be brought home to him in some most painful and offensive manner, that determined me to confer with you upon the subject.”—

“ At least, let me clearly understand what we are talking about,” resumed the proprietor of Deasmarsh.—“ In the first place, *whose* evil doings is poor Cromer supposed to have countenanced ? ”

“ Before I venture to reply, sir,” rejoined Milnward, respectfully, “ permit me to assure you that my own opinion on the question is wholly neutral. — The unfortunate circumstances which have given rise to so factious a spirit on the part of Mr. Cromer’s parishioners, occurred before I entered upon my duties.—From *him* I know nothing whatever on the subject : and from the high terms of panegyric in which, since his return to his duties, I have heard him speak of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt,—”

“My son?” interrupted Mordaunt, again resuming his original interest in the debate.

“—convince me,” continued Milward, “that the reports which have given rise in the village to the blackest of inferences, are altogether false and calumnious.”

“Reports involving my son Reresby?”

“And the daughter of my friend Mr. Cromer.”

“Tu, tu, tu, tu!”—cried Mordaunt, inexpressibly relieved. “Is *that*, my dear sir, the wonderful dilemma which has been lengthening your face for the last quarter of an hour, and frightened me half out of my wits?—Set your mind at ease!—A misconception—a blunder—an old wife’s transposition of persons! There is nothing more, I promise you, between Miss Emma and my son, than between old Excellency Settringham, as they call him at Basinghill, and one of the prim Miss Moulseys!”

“I am heartily rejoiced to hear it, sir.

There only remains for us to devise the surest means of checking the circulation of the slander before it extend from the village to the country, and perhaps attain in the end the fatal publicity of the newspaper press."

"Why, after all," rejoined his companion, unable to repress a smile at the monsterring of nothings, in which the ignorance of the world of poor young Milnward seemed prone to indulge, "the worst they could say would be neither very injurious nor very hard of disapproval. Were the papers to go the lengths of announcing a marriage between the parties, nothing easier than to make them contradict it!"—

"But neither the report nor the contradiction, I fear, would go far to re-establish Mr. Cromer in the esteem of his parishioners," said Milnward, gravely shaking his head.

"Why, do you mean to say," cried Mor-daunt, not a little diverted at what he conceived to be the pragmatism of the

young curate, "that the Deaswold folks have deserted the church it is their duty to attend, merely because the Rector's daughter has been seen laughing and chatting occasionally with a fine young man, whose acquaintance would do honour to any girl in the kingdom?"

A sudden flush rose to the cheek of the reverend moralist, who remained coldly silent.

"Or that the farmers' wives are such confounded prudes," added Mordaunt, a little nettled, "as to fancy that a parson's daughter is not to open her eyes, ears, and lips, like other young women of her age?"—

"I am not a man of the world, Mr. Mordaunt," replied Milnward, almost sternly. "But, even if ungoverned on such subjects by professional reserve, I should be of opinion that the unfortunate business we are discussing is such as ought not to be treated with levity. If, instead of meditating *contradiction* of the reports that your son is disposed to

repair by marriage the offence offered to the honour of an old and respectable family, you were disposed to sanction his union with—”

“With Jacob Cromer’s daughter?” impatiently interrupted Mordaunt. “I tell you, my dear sir, again and again, that, from first to last, you are under a mistake. There never was a question of love or marriage between these young people. On a first acquaintance, indeed, my son might be a little taken by Emma’s pretty face and artless character. But there is nothing in such a girl to fix the affections of a young man of high pretensions and superior faculties, like my son.”

“The more to be lamented that his conduct should have given rise to impressions so different,” said Milnward, disapprovingly; “and if, in justice to Emma Cromer, he were to lower the pretensions you speak of—”

“In one, sir,” cried Mordaunt, with angry abruptness—“the hand and heart of my son are otherwise disposed of.”

"God's will be done!" was the pious rejoinder of his visitor. "I was in hopes that public atonement on *his* part might at least tend to the exoneration of my unfortunate friend."

"Without feeling myself called upon to enter more fully into my family affairs, sir," resumed Mordaunt, out of patience, "permit me to observe that I see no possible call for exoneration on the part of my son!"

"Not after inveigling the unhappy girl (*child* I might almost call her, at the period her indiscretions began!) into clandestine meetings, out of reach of her father's protecting arm,—out of reach of the decencies of home,—in a lonely building, with only his own evil intentions to keep watch over her unguarded youth—"

"False—utterly false! You presume, sir, upon your sacred functions to come and insult me with an infernal falsehood!" cried Mordaunt, every pulse within him throbbing with

indignation. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Milnward!" added he, in an humbled voice, on perceiving his young visitor rise hastily from his chair, to quit the room, "but you are really trying me too far. Flesh and blood may not endure so foul a charge against one of the best hearted and most gentlemanly young fellows in the world!"

Willingly accepting the apology of one whose blindness of paternal pride and tenderness was proverbial among his friends, the young clergyman patiently resumed his seat.

"It was because prepared for some such outburst of indignation, sir," said he, "that I hesitated to enter your doors for the purpose of addressing you on a subject so painful and so delicate. But you insisted on being enlightened!"

"But I am *not* enlightened. All you say tends only further to bewilder me!" cried Mordaunt. "I again earnestly entreat you, Mr. Milnward, to speak out! What is it you

mean ? What has induced you to bring forward this extraordinary charge against my son ?”

“ The indignation, sir, of the whole village of Deaswold. But that indignation has a deeper origin. I am grieved to say, sir, that the angry feelings existing against both young Mr. Mordaunt and the Rectory, are mainly attributable to the evil instigations of Cromer Hall—”

“ I could have sworn it !” interrupted Mordaunt, breathing more freely.

“ In justice, however, to Mr. Cromer, I ought to state,” added Milnward, “ that the moment it was brought to his knowledge, by the testimony of an eyewitness, that his niece and your son held daily clandestine meetings at Deasmill, he proceeded straight to his brother, and warned him of the fact—”

“ The deuce he did !”—

“ But, blinded by simple-minded good faith, and implicit confidence in his child, the Rector expressed total disbelief, in terms that

have produced an irreconcilable rupture between the two brothers."

"I was afraid," murmured Mordaunt, as though speaking to himself, "that Deasmarsh went for something in the animosity at present existing between them!"—

"The Squire, it appears," continued his visitor, "has not scrupled to assert that his brother was cognizant, from the first, of all that has been going on between his daughter and your son; but that, in the hope of patching up a match between them,—in the hope of making a marriage indispensable on any terms,—he was content to close his eyes to the affair."

"Infamous, infamous!—and as groundless as it is base!"

"So I am fully convinced—so I never hesitated to believe. The opinion, nevertheless, has gained ground. The Rector's obstinate adherence to *your* cause in opposition to his brother, whenever parish dissensions have

arisen, has given colour, sir, to the impression of his subservience to the richest man in the district."

"I wish those who say so could witness the mulish obstinacy of my friend Jacob whenever (and the occasions are neither few nor far between) we differ on political questions!—I sometimes accuse him of being (next to myself) the most pig-headed fellow in the county!"—

"The intimacy apparent between you induces other notions in the village. Thanks to his brother's insinuations, his parishioners are convinced that he is prepared to go all lengths in the sacrifice of his principles and respectability, to secure your favour. Farmer Richards, for a long time one of the warmest of his partisans, on finding him return the other day from London an advocate of free trade,—a convert to the well-known doctrines of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt — exclaimed publicly in the vestry, that, if so weak on *one*

point, he could believe all that had been reported;—that the man who could sacrifice his country to propitiate a wealthy neighbour, would even sacrifice his daughter!”—

“All this, I fear, is more serious than I at first supposed it,” said Mordaunt, shaking his head. “Calumny is a fiendish imp, that shoots up into a giant while one’s eyes are winking.—To gratify the unbrotherly malice of one of the meanest of men, I am afraid more briars have been planted in the path of my poor friend Jacob than it will be altogether easy to root up.”

“I trust,” rejoined Milnward, “he will have philosophy enough, — or *better* than philosophy,—to meet with patience whatever vexation may be inflicted on him by the bad spirit of the Deaswold people.—But, though possessed of sufficient confidence in his daughter and respect for Mr. Reresby Mordaunt to regard with contempt the vile insinuations which have endeavoured

to connect the testimony of Drewe the labourer with the melancholy event at Deasmill—”

“ *What* event at Deasmill ?”—interrupted Mordaunt.

“ The discovery of the dead infant in the Deas, adjoining the mill-works. I greatly fear, I say, that the mere fact of such a circumstance having been for a single moment supposed to inculcate the daughter to whom he is so fondly attached, may exercise a grievous influence over his health.”—

“ By Heaven and earth, this is too bad !” cried Mordaunt, starting up, and with agitated footsteps pacing the room. “ Have you really the courage to tell me in cool blood that you believe, or that any human being asserts, or has ever ventured to assert, the criminality of that poor innocent child at the Rectory,—or to connect such an act as child-murder with the honourable name of my son ?”—

“ If I fancied there existed the smallest

grounds for such a charge, Mr. Mordaunt," gravely expostulated the young clergyman, "should I, think you, have hazarded the measure of this audience? No, sir!—I do *not* believe it!—I am convinced that the whole story is a foul and groundless calumny. But it is believed by *many*. The story was insinuated into my ear before I had been many days in Deaswold: and, at first, I treated it as a contemptible slander, likely to be speedily disproved by the discovery of the real delinquents. Unluckily, this was not the case; and on visiting Deasmill, for the purpose of sifting the matter, I found from the Clemsons that they had been subject to the most cruel accusations in consequence, according to *their* account, of evil reports emanating from Cromer Hall. Wherever I went, meanwhile, the scandal was beforehand with me. The whole village was in commotion; and, on the arrival of the Rector to do a day's duty, three weeks ago, I was afraid he could not

but notice the altered deportment of his parishioners.”—

“I *did* think him out of spirits when he came to Deasmarsh,” observed Mordaunt frankly ; “but little suspected the cause !”—

“He had probably received some personal slight,” rejoined Milnward :—“but certain am I that so outspoken a nature as his would have been unable to restrain its indignation a moment, had he suspected its origin.”—

“I verily believe you !” rejoined Mordaunt, with a gesture indicative of his own irritation.—“Though my gray hairs ought to keep cool my blood, and though, in my youth, of no very irascible temperament, I promise you it requires some effort on my part not to make the best of my way, this very moment, to Cromer Hall, and call to account the sneaking scoundrel who has maligned his own flesh and blood as well as vilified my son.”—

“I fear, sir, the report has by this time

transpired too widely for even *him* to repair the mischief he has done!"—said Milnward, rising to take leave.

"And what then do you suggest by way of antidote to the evil?" cried Mr. Mordaunt, with some hauteur.—"You can scarcely have taken so strong a step as to alarm a father's heart on such a subject, Mr. Milnward, without having remedial measures to propose?"—

"*My* interest in the subject," rejoined his visitor, "is of course limited to anxiety for the peace and welfare of my friends at the Rectory; whom I conceive to be victims to the envious, jealous spirit of their kinsman at Cromer Hall.—But, were the case my own, Mr. Mordaunt,—that is, were I situated as you are,—I would not stir a step in it previous to consulting with my son. — He *ought* to be apprized of what is going on. He ought to be acquainted with the injurious conduct of John Cromer."

"True enough!" interrupted Mordaunt in

a lower voice. "For a thousand reasons, he should be warned of *that*!"—

"And when he has informed you, in return, what portion of Drewe's testimony is founded on fact, so as to afford you exact data on which to defend his cause, no time should be lost in bringing the matter to the strictest scrutiny and disproof."—

"I will be off to town to-morrow by the early train," cried Mordaunt, at once adopting the idea.

"And why not, my dear sir, to-night? Why not start for London by the train that is about to take me into Hertfordshire?"—

"Because, most unluckily, the Rector and his daughter are engaged to dine with me to-day; and should poor Jacob have become alive, in the interim, to the ill will of which he is the object, he might attribute my sudden absence to ungraciousness."

"You are right—quite right, sir," said the departing guest, preparing to quit the room.

“His feelings ought to be our first object.— And now that my most painful duty is accomplished, suffer me to take leave by thanking you for your kindness during my stay in this part of the country ;—a kindness that would be not a little increased could I obtain a promise that, should anything further transpire concerning this painful affair, you will kindly set my anxieties at rest.”

The promise being readily given, Milnward, with a heavy heart, bade adieu to the spot where his ministry had prospered so much less fully than he could have wished ;—leaving Mordaunt to fulfil the duty that hung heavy on his shoulders, of playing the courteous host to Emma and her father.—To accost poor Jacob, indeed, though a sad, was not a difficult task,—so thoroughly did his worthy neighbour sympathize in his situation.—But at present, he felt ill at his ease with Jacob’s daughter.—His mind was not fully made up.—

Though incapable of a bad or dishonourable

action, Reresby was not proof against the weaknesses of his age.—The example of foreign countries might, moreover, have relaxed the principles of morality imbibed amid the rigid decencies of his early home; and his father did not feel *quite* secure that his handsome son might not have dealt more lightly with this bright-eyed and unguarded girl than became either their relative position or his engagements with her cousin.

On the morrow, he should satisfy himself by a single inquiry of his son. One word of Reresby's would resolve him.—Meanwhile, the unsuspecting girl who dined at Deasmarsh, and talked so glibly of London and its pleasures, was a grievous stumbling-block in the way of the distressed father.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I never tempted her with word too large,
But as a brother to a sister show'd
Bashful sincerity and comely love.

SHAKSPEARE.

“ My dear father !” cried Reresby, starting up from his breakfast-table next morning to welcome one who, wise enough to eschew at that pleasant season of the year the stony ways of the great metropolis, was indeed an unexpected guest. — “ What in the world brings you to town ?—Nothing is amiss, I trust, at home ?”—

“ Nothing,—nothing !”—cried the bustling country gentleman, who seemed to introduce into the London bachelor’s paradise a wholesome whiff from the far off fields and forests, and whose premeditated reserve, till satisfied

of the irreproachability of his son, gave way the very moment he looked upon his face.—“I am in town on business, my dear boy, about which we will talk when you have given me a cup of tea and a slice of tongue.—I was afraid, as I came along, that your breakfast hour might be over.—I was afraid you would be out.”

“My breakfast hour *is* over, though, luckily, not my breakfast!”—cried Reresby, glancing at the clock on his chimney-piece, after again heartily shaking his hand with his visitor.—“But we did not divide this morning till half-past four.—A glorious majority!—Ninety-four, instead of the eighty-three on which we reckoned!”

And in a moment, in spite of himself, Mordaunt was deep in details of the debate.—“*Who* had spoken, — *who* answered, — *who* distinguished himself?”—The instincts of the public man were aroused. He forgot that there was a Deaswold rectory in the world!—

For full half an hour, they talked of nothing but politics. — At the *end* of half an hour, Mordaunt saw in the young man before him only the zealous servant of the country, — only the illustrator of his name, — only the son who was to work his way to Canningship. — To tax him with a crime, — to tax him even with an act of folly, — would have been sacrilege. — Ere, however, the prospects of the kingdom were half discussed by two ardent patriots, who talked, not for victory but mutual enlightenment, Reresby's servant brought in a note which was opened with a degree of nonchalance proclaiming it, though addressed in a female hand, to be of a nature to fear nothing from his father's presence.

“ Lady Barton's servant waits for an answer, sir,” said the valet; and after a hasty perusal, Reresby returned a verbal reply—

“ My compliments to Lady Barton, and I will endeavour to send her, in the course of

the day, the order she requires.—One of those tiresome women,” added he, turning, as the servant left the room, to his father, (who, the moment the name of the widow of the late celebrated was mentioned, lapsed into severity and sternness of countenance,)—“one of those tiresome women who are always pestering one for admissions to the lady’s gallery at the House of Commons; which, containing only accommodation for a dozen persons, is sure to be bespoken.”—

Mr. Mordaunt finished his tea in silence.

“And all for the affectation of pretending to listen to a debate which interests them about as much as the muster roll of a regiment!”—resumed the young member;—“inasmuch as their cackling is said to render the adjoining gallery insupportable to people who go there to listen instead of talk!—However, I must procure Lady Barton what she asks for!” added he, in a more cheerful tone. “I have nothing to refuse to the sister-in-law of

Jacob Cromer,—the aunt of dear little Emma!"—

This was indeed speaking out!—Mr. Mor-daunt's heart steeled itself at once!—

"While they were in town, then," said he, "you renewed the intimacy which appeared to have a little fallen off at Deasmarsh?"

"Naturally!—In London, Emma Cromer was my '*payse*!'—In London, Emma served to bring all Northamptonshire before my eyes!"

"And among the other spots of Northamptonshire which she serves to recall," demanded his father, almost rivalling the frown of Olympian Jove in the stern knitting of his brows,—“pray do you include *Deas-mill*?"—

"Indeed I do, my dear father!"—cried Reresby,—concluding from the significance of his father's manner that poor Magdalen must be in his mind. "Officious persons, I see, have told you all!—But they have only anticipated my purpose. I pledged myself to

Emma before she quitted London, that I would make a clean breast of it; and that you should have the means of judging the peculiar delicacy of our situation.”—

“ And after *that*,” cried Mordaunt, thinking aloud, “ she had the audacity to come with a smiling face and dine with his mother and sister !” —

“ And why not, my dear father ?” — cried Reresby, a little hurt. — “ No blame can be imputed to *her* ! — *Her* conduct, God knows, has been every thing that is frank and generous !” —

“ Frank and generous !” again ejaculated the elder Mordaunt, shrugging his shoulders. “ Ay, the frankness and generosity which a magistrates’ bench rewards with hard labour or a solitary cell !” —

“ I never before heard you illiberal, father !” cried the thunderstruck Reresby. “ I hardly know you this morning !” —

“ And *I* hardly know my son !” — retorted

the elder Mordaunt, deeply affected.— “ That you were rash, — that you were indiscreet,— that you were warmer-blooded than prudence admits, Reresby, I was fully aware. — But I would have perilled my soul that you would rather forfeit your own, than bring down in sorrow to the grave the gray hairs of a good man like Jacob Cromer, or break the heart of such a girl as his niece !”

“ My father pleading the cause of Magdalen ?” exclaimed Reresby, in mingled joy and surprise.

“ As a matter of personal feeling,” gravely resumed his father,—“ I was certainly desirous that you should attach yourself otherwise than to the daughter of the man of all England I most despise and detest. But, having done so, and inveigled her innocent affections, so that, I am told by those who know her, she has never lifted up her head since you left the country, and is in some danger of following her sisters to an untimely grave—”

“ My poor dear Magdalen ! ”—cried Reresby, clasping his hands.

“ Having, I say,” continued old Mordaunt, “ wrought all this mischief to the poor young creature, trust me, Reresby, that, among the many by whom your cruel duplicity will be condemned, first and foremost will be your father ! ”—

“ My cruel *duplicity* towards her ! ”—cried his son. “ When I have acted only in reluctant obedience to your commands ! ”—

“ How, sir ! you presume to ascribe to *me* your infamous levity of conduct ? ”—

Concluding that his father must allude to his attentions to Lady Belvedere, (which had probably transpired at Deasmarsh through the giddy prattling of Emma) Reresby looked foolish, and was silent. — But Mr. Mordaunt fixed his eyes so steadily upon him while waiting a reply, that he at length managed to stammer forth—“ I assure you, sir, it was a mere flirtation ! — my intentions were never

serious. — At *my* age, surely there is no great crime in a *passetemps* of that description?"

"*Passetemps*, indeed!" — reiterated his indignant father — swelling with scorn. — "Always a French epithet when vice or folly is to be disguised! — But let me tell you that, if you venture to show your face at Deasmarsh, sir, you may chance to find that Northamptonshire bumpkins entertain stout English notions on such points! Already, thanks to your '*passetemps*,' they have insulted their pastor and all but desecrated the House of God. — Nay, thanks to your '*passetemps*,' the girl herself is exposed to the scoffs and scorns of the whole village of Deaswold!" —

"Magdalen?" — exclaimed the young man, — a little astonished at the *ricochet*. —

"Magdalen? — No! — the graceless baggage for whom you have abandoned her!" —

Now though "graceless baggage" was an epithet which, however severe, might be applied without much injustice to the Coun-

tess of Belvedere, — the word “girl” was a puzzler! —

“I am beginning to suspect, my dear father,” cried Reresby, “that we do not quite understand each other! — Tell me distinctly, what it is you disapprove in my conduct; or whether I have the smallest hope that you will relent in my favour, so as to advance the epoch of my marriage with Magdalen Cromer?” —

Thus clearly apostrophized, Mr. Mordaunt’s explanations became equally lucid. — All he had heard from Milnward was speedily related; and to his joy, the indignation of Reresby, as he listened, more than kept pace with his own.

“Poor Emma! — poor kind-hearted little Emma!” cried he. “Hard, indeed, that *she* should be the victim of my folly; — she, who might have vindicated herself by a single word! — For, when talking over with her in London my engagement to her cousin, she

frankly owned that, thanks to the restlessness of girlish curiosity — (she called it curiosity, but I suspect that a *little* spice of woman's jealousy mingled in the leaven) she had discovered, very soon after they commenced, my clandestine meetings with Magdalen; and that, on one occasion, enraged at our want of confidence in her, she was on the point of entering Clemson's cottage to confound us!"

"She appears to be a generous, warm-hearted girl," — said the elder Mordaunt, — using the very epithet he had resented when applied by his son. — "The more reason that we should lose no time in extricating her from the abominable aspersions her uncle has been the means of drawing upon her head."

"But what is to be *done*?" — inquired the young member. — "Her father, thank goodness, — that is, thank *his* goodness, — is too excellent to have so much as listened to the imputations devised by the Squire. As regards *him* she needs no vindication. — And as to

those confounded fellows at Deaswold, (who, I suppose, have scarcely yet recovered the shock of their corn-law defeat) *our* assuring them that Miss Emma Cromer is as pure as unsunned snow, — that she never set foot in Deasmill in her life, except to carry essence of mustard to old Clemson for the cure of his rheumatism, — and that, as to the little victim found in the Deas, it was doubtless the offspring of one of their own disreputable daughters, — would have only the effect of establishing their contrary belief! — What *fact* have we to adduce in answer to the calumnies of the Squire? — It would hardly do to have the Honourable Member for Castle Dangan making an affidavit before poor Jacob, or Sir William Settringham, that he is not so great a blackguard as represented! — For though I have suspicions, *and strong ones*, respecting the child and its murderers, I have no positive evidence to bring forward.”

“*Suspicious?*” — cried Mordaunt, the

instinct of the magistrate suddenly flaring up.

“ *That* point, my dear father, we will discuss hereafter. What I would first determine, is the surest and speediest mode of vindicating the character of Emma Cromer ?”—

“ You seem to find it easier, my sapient son, to unravel the mighty maze of political economy, than see an inch beyond your nose !” cried his father, endeavouring to rally his spirits.—“ There is clearly but one mode of accomplishing this desirable object, which is—”

Reresby stood suddenly still to listen.—

“ By proceeding straight to Cromer Hall, and demanding of its caitiff of an owner—the hand of his daughter !”—

At that moment, Mr. Mordaunt’s looks were better to be understood than his words ! Reresby saw that he was in earnest ; for his eyes were glistening with emotion.—

“ And you would make such a sacrifice of

your prejudices, my dearest father?— you actually authorize such a measure?”—

“ Actually !—To-morrow, if you choose !— I owe it to the son I am so justly proud of, —I owe it to my worthy friend the Rector,— I owe it to the merry-hearted little girl who has been so shamefully dealt with,—as well as to the charming one of whom my anxious inquiries have been able to find out nothing but good, and whom I hope soon to fold to my heart as a daughter !”—

In a moment Reresby was in his arms, and both were silent.

“ And, above all,” added the deeply-moved father, as soon as he could recover his utterance, “ I owe it to that Almighty Being who has surrounded my path with the blessings of life ; and will surely exact of one who has been made so happy, that he render others happy in return.”

No counter-argument was necessary. Mor-daunt spoke like an oracle ; and, grateful and

overjoyed, his son had already *almost* forgiven the Squire those vile and gratuitous slanders, which had proved the means of bringing about an event so little hoped-for.

“ I scarcely dare mention, just now, the name of the Freshleys, my dear father,” added the happy young man, “ lest it should bring before your mind’s eye the handsome house in town, and good establishment, and submissive little wife, with which it once appeared connected. But let it be some comfort to you to know, that there is still a chance of Burtsmill’s being enjoyed by your grandchildren!—I had a letter yesterday from Tom, in which, though he speaks much of his examination, he talks so much more of the misery of finding himself a hundred miles distant from the engine chimneys which most people are so glad to escape from, that—”

“ Stuff and nonsense!” interrupted Mordaunt, with a good-humoured smile. “ Do you suppose I don’t know all about it? For

what purpose did you fancy I packed off your brother into Lancashire last Christmas?— I should have found it twice as hard a matter to forgive your infatuation for the daughter of the Squire, had I not known your brother to be far better suited than yourself both to Claudia and her uncle!—Nothing further on the subject, however, if you please, till after the examination.—For when we come to the scratch, I am afraid my friend Freshley will be sadly disappointed at having to put up with second best; and Tom will be all the more thought of at Burtmill, if he present himself as a suitor, sinking under university honours.”

“ You really think, my dear father, that there exist places and people still influenced by such barren laurels?”

“ What think you of Settringham Abbey? What think you makes Sir William look upon that learned oaf of his as a Solon, but his senior wranglership and the F.R.S. appended

to his name?—It was a source of indescribable bitterness to even the Melfonts, that their son George should have stopped so far short of the distinctions achieved by a certain Reresby Mordaunt, who wore no gold tassel to his cap.”

“ In that case, I pardon the besotment of Burtsmill ! ”

“ *Besotment* is a severe word.—We prize our salvers and flagons the more for having the Hall mark upon them, in proof that they are of standard value. And trust me, my dear boy, that no man, whether top-sawyer or bottom,—whether destined to a curate’s wooden settle or the woolsack,—gets on the worse in the world for having taken a high degree !—Besides, if Tom have the good fortune to secure this excellent match, no reason that he should not hereafter figure in parliament, and ensure double honour to our name.”—

By these arguments, Reresby was overjoyed

to perceive that the sacrifice of feeling meditated by his father, gave him less pain than, at one time, might have been expected. People undergoing a deep mortification have seldom courage to look to the bright side of things. Much of his philosophy, however, was attributed by his son to immersion in the civilizing stream of that vast metropolis, where Self dwindles into a molecule.—Sentiments which, within sight of the steeple of Deaswold, might have expanded into dragons and wyverns, became very small deer in an atmosphere which possesses the power of diminishing every object viewed through its medium.—

It became the policy of Reresby, therefore, to keep his father in town, and in his excellent intentions, till some irrecoverable step had been taken ; and, on pretence of wanting his company while he went in search of the order for the House of Commons, which had so curiously led the way to a stormy discus-

sion ending in so glorious a rainbow, Reresby contrived to drag his father where he was sure to fall in the way of Sir John Grovynor Grovynor; who not only insisted on detaining his country neighbour in London to join a dinner party that day at his house, but carried him off in his Brougham (looking, as Reresby saucily observed, like a double-kernelled nut), to visit half a dozen patentees of new inventions, calculated to smooth the ways of this world of ruts and inequalities.

When left alone with his happy thoughts, the bosom of the enraptured young man became almost too narrow to contain them! Since his first encounter with Magdalen in the meadows where Don and Donna pounced upon her as a fit object for the game-bag, never had he felt so much in love!—All he had recently heard from Emma of her cousin's sufferings for his sake; of her gentle and endearing qualities, and the sad life she was leading; and, above all, all he had seen in London of

the wilfulness and recklessness of other women, conspired to bring out, with more than its original beauty and freshness, the lovely image imprinted on his heart. Like Lady Madrepore's autograph of John Tradescant, the faded characters arose in all their pristine distinctness, when exposed to chemical action. He seemed to tread on air. His bosom's lord sat as lightly on its throne as Taglioni on a daisy. Lucky that the grand questions of the session were at an end, and the orators of the day left to chew the cud of sweet and bitter laurels; for, in his present mood, the honourable member for Castle Dangan ran some danger of addressing "Mr. Speaker" as "my beloved Magdalen!"

The prospect of belonging to the Cromer Hall family was, indeed, something of a drawback. The narrow-minded Squire, (a better man than whom might have been carved out of grit-stone),—the Mrs. Glasse of a mother, whose storeroom was her petty universe,—

and the coarse unlettered brothers, of whose ruffianly habits much worse was known to Reresby than to his father,—were certainly untempting kindred. But, after passing them in review,

came wandering by
A spirit like an angel ;—

an angel, whom it would be happiness indeed to translate to a more genial sphere! After all, it was better, perhaps, that her family should be so detestable!—Her happiness in wedlock would be all the more complete from having nothing to regret among those she left behind at Cromer Hall. His optimism, in short, was optissimé.

On joining Lady Mary Grovynor Grovynor's dinner-party, poor Reresby seemed like one inspired. His lips were touched with fire. Darting with brilliant eloquence

From grave to gay,—from lively to severe,—

he so electrified the company by high spirits that passed for wit, and fluency that sounded

like sense, and, above all, by resuming the debate of the preceding night with a ripeness of humour that "Punch" might have envied (and which Cad Rowlandson made his fortune for the remainder of the season by imitating wherever he dined, about as ably as one of Teniers' pictures is copied on the pipeclay bowl of a tobacco-pipe!) that Sir John Grovynor Grovynor sat revolving it in his mind whether a patent could not be taken out for him, or at least his good things rendered copyright.—

Nothing he would not have done to render other people as happy as himself! He would have stinted in his talk and cried "ay!" had Lady Belvedere beset him with her usual accusations against the new Lady Fauconberg, of being the most Jenny-Jonesish of the daughters of the land that gives its name to the heir apparent of the throne; protesting that the Welsh heiress had been heard to order her coachman drive to "Lady Pelve-

dere's in Pelgrave Square." Or he would have bestowed upon Lady Madrepore his Cochin-Chinese Amulet, or the point of a Sphinx's jasper tail, knocked off by his own hammer at Memphis.—No possible sacrifice would have appeared too great!—

"Why have you not been in Belgrave Square to-day?" inquired Sir Herbert Glynn, snatching him by the sleeve, as he attempted to flit through the crowd with which Mary Grovynor Grovynor was in the habit of prolonging through a whole evening the tediousness of her dinner.—"Lady Bel. was in hopes that, now Doctor and Miss Primrose are gone back to Wakefield, Squire Thornhill might fall once more to the share of Lady Blarney and Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs!"

"My father is in town, and I have had worlds of things to do to-day," replied Reresby. "But, if you see Lady Belvedere, pray tell her I will call upon her, if possible,

before I leave town. I should be grieved that she thought me negligent!"—

"Don't distract yourself on her account!" said his friend, surprised at his unusual unction. "I don't believe her ladyship to be in immediate danger of prussic acid!—Indeed, seeing that you have not called these three days, and finding it a bore to have many-buttoned pages sent after me with triangular notes, inquiring what has become of my friend Mr. Mordaunt, I put it into her head, yesterday, that Dick Lovell was going into a decline for her sake; a bait so readily swallowed, that I am not without hopes of seeing Knightsbridge and Sheet Street barracks cut out the Houses of Lords and Commons!"

"But what had Lord Richard done to you, that you should bring such a *corvée* down in judgment on him?"—

"*Done?*—What has he done since he was born, but convert full bottles into empty ones; and, being squeamish,

Damn the climate like a lord!—

However, if not amusing in himself, he will be the cause of amusement to others. In the first place, think of the fun of seeing Mark Trevor playing *violino secondo* in a deep-drawn sigh; and of Lady Bel.'s amazement at finding that the Shadow will be a lost Shadow, unless she can find in her heart 'lodgings for *two* single gentlemen!'—

"Too bad,—too bad!" cried Reresby, though laughing heartily at what he condemned.

"Above all, think of the *potage* that will be served up in Belgrave Square, when my charming cousin (who invariably extends her hospitalities to the *alentours* of her reigning Romeo) intermingles the cornets of the Household Brigade with Fauconberg's sages and poets, who have not yet deserted the establishment!—How each faction will wonder at the other!—Since Pizarro's expedition astonished the weak minds of the Mexicans, nothing like their mutual amazement!—But what are you

in such a confounded hurry to get away for?"—cried Sir Herbert, on finding it likely that, from his friend's struggles for self-extrication, his button would remain in his hand.

"I am looking for a pair."

"For the remainder of the session?"—

"*That*, alas! is past praying for!—But till Wednesday next.—I have promised to accompany my father back to Deasmarsh."—

"And is it quite certain that you cannot continue to keep him and yourself in town another day?" anxiously inquired Sir Herbert.

"For what purpose? On the contrary, I am dying to get into Northamptonshire!"—

"To the feet of Miss Cromer?"—

"To the feet of Miss Cromer!" replied Reresby—not thinking it necessary to remind his friend that there were more Miss Cromers in the parish of Deaswold than the one whom the Countess of Belvedere honoured with her jealousy.—And Sir Herbert, whose object in wishing to keep the Mordaunts in town was

simply to obtain an answer, ere he lost sight of them, to the letter in which he had ventured to explain to Matilda all his misconceptions,—all his enlightenment,—all his penitence,—and, above all, his deep and devoted attachment,—was forced to keep his own counsel.

If the surmises expounded by the Rector's daughter were correct, who knows but he might be invited to accompany the father and son to the happy spot that seemed about to be converted into the temple of Hymen?—Who knows but, in total defiance of Lindley Murray, the superlative might be made to admit of comparison ; and *two* happiest of men make their appearance by the self-same mail-train at Deasmarsh Park !—

CHAPTER XXIV.

L'intelligence ne trouve qu'en elle-même l'aliment de sa vie. Sois juste et fort. Vis en toi-même et cherche ce qui ne périt point. Tu ne trouveras pas la paix dans les choses. Cherche la dans ton cœur. La force est la loi de la nature : la puissance, c'est la volonté : l'énergie dans les peines est meilleure que l'apathie dans les voluptés.

MANUEL DE PSEUSOPHANES.

Great as had been the satisfaction of the Rector and his daughter on their way home to Deaswold, and intense their delight in feasting their eyes once more on the fair face of the country, still more elate were the spirits of Mordaunt and his son while pursuing the self-same road.—Search England over, and you would not have found two happier people ; —the father from having just obtained a glorious victory over himself; the son from knowing that he held in his hand a pass-key

to the garden of Eden.—Happiness and the object of his love were about to become his own for ever!—

The blood of the Man of Capital must have been “snowbroth,” indeed, had it not flowed the freer while traversing the prosperous and influential railroad, devised by his spirit of enterprise, and forwarded by his activity,—towards a district which he had rescued from stagnation so as to constitute himself its second providence: a district where, under his auspices, swampy fields had become a noble park,—unwholesome hovels, commodious cottages,—discontented labourers, thriving workmen,—and, above all, mischievous and savage urchins, well-conditioned, well-taught children, promising a better order of things hereafter.

For, if there still lingered sufficient moral malaria in the village of Deaswold to engender infanticide and slander, it was thanks to the class called into existence by the sordid su-

pineness of the Squire; who had refused to institute schools for his tenantry, lest their Helotism should grow weary of slavery, and those who learned to read, forget to work.

But, at the present moment, when the warm heart of the prosperous man was learning to contemplate the bright home of his creation in a new light, as the cradle of a future generation, a spot where he should behold the happiness of his excellent son perfected, and roses springing among his laurels,—no wonder that his heart overflowed with a double measure of milk and honey!—

He had been slow to adopt Magdalen; but, once adopted, she had become at once a child of his own. He longed to tell her so. He longed to tell her how he had tried to discover flaws in the “one entire and perfect crysolite” so treasured by his son; and tried in vain.—He longed to ask her forgiveness for not having loved her at first sight, and overlooked that the Juliet of his Romeo was born a Capulet.—

Great excuses were owing to her, as well as long arrears of happiness; and both should be bestowed with compound interest and an ungrudging hand.

It would be as easy as pleasant to brighten the lot of one accustomed to so scanty a portion of the pastimes of life. From all that Mordaunt had gleaned of his future daughter-in-law from her uncle,—from her village pensioners and pitying neighbours,—he fancied that he understood her tastes, and he had discovered the precise way of making her happy. He was certain that she would like Deasmarsh. It would sever her from none of the objects she had loved in youth.—As a matron, she would kneel in the same church which had witnessed her maiden orisons. She would listen to the teaching of the same pious pastor. She would hail the burst of Spring in the same bank of violets, and sun herself under the same propitious skies. The foreground of the picture, indeed, would be

coloured with brighter hues, and the atmosphere she breathed be laden, for the first time, with the balmy incense of love and joy ! And, as he pondered upon all this, (considering that thirty years of his life had been spent in the grimy environs of Burtmill) it was amazing how romantic the old gentleman was becoming. A second summer was sending up its after-grass in his path.

As to the young lover, to follow the vagaries of *his* imagination, to portray the wild confusion of joyful presages flitting like humming birds through his fancy, would be like endeavouring to paint the rainbow,—a task defying the palette of Rubens himself. The idea of clasping to his heart his beloved Magdalen with the sanction of *his* father and her own, and repaying by the most public deference of homage his sense of the injury her good name had incurred for his sake, made him fancy that even a speed of thirty miles an hour was as slow as Settringham Abbey.

Like Imogen, he wanted a "horse with wings," to bear him where he might feast his eyes once more upon the fairest of human faces,—the face whose smiles were all his own.

It might have amused an indifferent spectator to hear the father and son playing with each other at didactic, when their hearts were over-brimming with boyish glee.

"Admit, my dear father," said Reresby, "that I earned my present happiness, by the implicit obedience I showed you, when driven from Deasmarsh, last winter, like Adam out of Paradise, without so much as a farewell look!"—

"As I had then reason to trust that the engagement might still be broken off," replied his father, "my harshness was meant for kindness;—kindness to *you* and justice to *her*."—

"Admit, at least, then," persevered Reresby,—"determined to be praised,—"that I deserve

some credit for having settled down at once to business on my arrival in London ; instead of letting grow my beard, or playing the despairing Orlando, or sending to the devil the constituency which had sent *me* to parliament?"—

" Are you *quite* sure that the smiles of celebrity did not a little outshine, just then, those of Miss Magdalen Cromer?" was his father's arch rejoinder. " Nay, don't defend yourself *too* vehemently ; or I shall feel sure of having hit home ! At all events, I perceive that the ill-effects of an atmosphere, apt at first to make people dizzy, have thoroughly worn off. Whatever may have been the case in May, before the great letters and Lady Belvedere had lost their magic power—Well, well !" cried he, interrupting himself,—when he saw his son out of countenance—" let us say no more about it !—All is right *now* ; and Sir Proteus has found his way back to his *true* love. And, by the way, apropos to the

fair Silvia, pray tell me, my dear boy, whether you ever happened to hear my daughter-in-law say whether she had a fancy for sapphires? —I was carried, yesterday, to a vanity-shop by Lady Mary double G—, (as our friend Glynne calls her) to look out for a bracelet to carry back to Matilda; and so, to save time and trouble, I even made a double purchase. Now I have two daughters, I must learn, you know, to buy in couples.—Having snatched a sly glance now and then at church at Magdalen's beautiful dark hair, I flatter myself I have chosen what will become her.”—

What joy to hear his father already talking in such a strain! In time, how fond and proud would he not become of the beautiful and blameless being devoted to the happiness of his son!—

“I cannot help anticipating some amusement,” said he, on finding his father disposed to pass so lightly over the disagreeables and difficulties of the case, “from witnessing the

sudden *ratting* of the Squire ;—and the ease with which wealth, so abhorrent in his eyes, will lose its offence when connected with the mighty dynasty of Cromer. He is just the man to become as cringing and sycophantic as he has been hitherto brutal.”

“ Don’t talk of *him*, if you wish me to remain happy and comfortable !” rejoined his father, with a sigh. “ If your dear Magdalen had only been Jacob’s daughter instead of his, I should not have a wish ungratified in the world ! It will cost me, I own, a grievous pang to make friendly overtures to Mr. Cromer of Cromer Hall ; though, like yourself, I suspect the bait will be greedily snapped at.”

In spite of so many interesting points to supply topics of conversation for the travellers, the few last stations made their appearance slowly. But when at length the Deas-marsh woods, glooming in the horizon, met the eyes of Reresby and his father just where

they had appeared like harbingers of home to the parson and the parson's daughter, their hearts became too full to say a word.

"Is my carriage waiting?" was Mordaunt's hasty inquiry, on stepping from the train at the Darley Station, without reflecting that he had afforded no intimation of the probability of his arrival. And the answer he received of—"No, sir. You are not expected. Miss Mordaunt brought a parcel addressed to you in London, to go by the three o'clock train; and seemed so anxious about its going, that I fancy it contained letters."

Additional reason for jumping into a fly and making the best of their way home; instead of the pleasant walk they had originally planned.

"How lovely and how tranquil the place looks!" cried Reresby, as the "fly-b'y" put his stout nag to its fullest trot, after passing the West Lodge gates, in honour of conveying through their fine domain the grandest folks

of the neighbourhood. "How famously well the plantations have got on this summer! How green it will appear to Magdalen, after the drought and nakedness of Cromer Hall!"

To render the pleasant surprise of his unexpected visit still greater to his mother and sister, he proposed, as they approached the house, to dismiss the fly, the coming wheels of which would be premonitory—and make their entrance by the garden front, through the pleasure-grounds; into which opened the saloon where, in summer time, the family spent their evenings. But scarcely had Reresby caught sight of the room and its occupants, when he repented his project, and would fain have retraced his steps to traverse the hall in the usual way. Something was sorely amiss! Matilda sat bathed in tears, with her mother leaning fondly over her chair.

Having seized his father by the arm with the intention of warning him of the state of the case, poor Reresby, whose heart had

been previously beating with joyous emotions, found no voice to express his uneasiness.

“Wait a moment, and let *me* go forward and announce you,” cried his father, unwilling to startle those who appeared in such deep affliction. And the moment he entered the room, his son could discern the “Thank God, you are come!” which accompanied the affectionate embraces of both mother and daughter.

“I am not only come, but have brought Reresby with me!” said he, wisely coming to the point at once. And almost before the words were pronounced, Matilda had dried her eyes and darted out upon the lawn, to bring in the welcome guest.

Great, however, as was their joy at seeing him, more especially as both his aspect and his father’s announced that their errand was satisfactory, neither Mrs. Mordaunt nor her daughter could conceal the distress of mind under which they laboured.

"No bad news of Tom?" inquired Mordaunt, in tones so low that he seemed afraid to let the words come out of his mouth. And when his wife replied at once that she "had heard nothing from Cambridge," he glanced round the room as much as to say, "Then are you not ashamed of crying?—Is it not well with all whom your soul loveth?"—

"We wrote to you, dear papa, by the evening train," said Matilda.

"So I heard, my dear, at the Station."

"Not at all expecting you to-night," added his wife, "I was in hopes my letter would hurry you down."

"Why, what has been the matter here?" said her husband, anxiously.

"*Here*, nothing!—But sad, sad news at the Rectory."

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed Mordaunt, while his son seemed already preparing to hasten off and afford whatever aid might be wanting.

“Our worthy friend, Jacob Cromer, is ill
—*seriously* ill!”—

“He was perfectly well the day he dined here?”

“Events have occurred since, which have smitten him to the dust.”

“My dear wife, you are keeping me on tenter-hooks!” remonstrated the breathless Mordaunt.

“Only because I hardly know how to word all I have to explain,” replied Mrs. Mordaunt, glancing at her daughter and son. A moment’s reflection on the imminence of the danger, however, strengthened her mind and relieved her scruples.

“I suspect you are aware,” she resumed, “though you never confided the fact to *me*, that for some time past the most infamous reports have prevailed in the village and neighbourhood—”

“About poor little Emma?—I know it, my dear! But certain explanations of a very

agreeable nature, which my son and I are about to make you, will happily put an end to such vile injustice."

"Put an end to it?—Heaven be praised!—But no!—we must misunderstand each other. On such a subject, *no* explanations could be agreeable."

"I allude," resumed her husband, "to certain meetings held between the young gentleman who now stands opposite you with a face as pale as ashes, at a place called Deas-mill, not a thousand miles from hence, and a certain young lady of the name of Cromer—"

"She *was* then in the habit of meeting you at Mrs. Clemson's?" cried Matilda, turning in consternation towards her brother, at so unexpected a confirmation of the slanders in circulation.

"Magdalen,—not Emma!"

"The young lady of Cromer Hall?" exclaimed Mrs. Mordaunt, aghast.

"Even so, my dear," replied her husband.

“The agreeable news I have to tell you is, that I have given my consent to a marriage between your son and a charming girl, in whom you must forget that you see the daughter of the lord of the manor.—*I* have already forgotten it!”

Warmly did the fond mother extend her arms in congratulation to her firstborn. Disapproval of what had been sanctioned by her husband was out of the question. All she could think of at that moment was, that her dear Reresby — her distinguished son — was about to establish himself in life.

“But surely,” said her husband, the first to extend his sympathies beyond the narrow circle of home, “surely, this false report has not so preyed on the mind of my good friend Jacob, in the course of a couple of days, as to render him seriously ill?”

“The error which caused one of the cousins to be taken for the other, by Mr. Cromer’s labourers, (who, one would think, might

have been readily distinguished between them, except that they probably regarded it as *impossible* for one so closely kept as the Squire's daughter to escape from home) is by no means the worst feature of the case. The brothers, as you are aware, have not spoken for months; and Jacob's political conversion, and the brilliant success in public life (if I may say so before him) of Reresby, have tended of late to aggravate the Squire into still bitterer animosity. From what I am able to gather, there is nothing that has not been advanced by the elder brother, and echoed by his brutal son, against the Rector and his daughter, to whosoever would lend an ear to their abuse. Two days ago, however, at a meeting of Protectionists that took place at Basinghill under the auspices of Aristobulus Settringham, he hazarded these aspersions in the most public manner. After alluding to the refusal to call an anti-league meeting at Deaswold, which he was pleased to attribute to our influence, he

added that, with two resident magistrates in the parish, its justice business was worse done than in any other in the county ; seeing that they played into each other's hands, and that what the one said, the other would swear to."

"But this regards *me* as much as Jacob," said Mordaunt, gravely ; and already, Reresby trembled at the idea of new insults offered to his father by Cromer Hall.

"Ay, but it was at the heart of Jacob, and not yours, the deadly aim was levelled!" added Mrs. Mordaunt ; "for he proceeded to declare, that, though you were in full possession of facts concerning the infant found drowned in the Deas which would send to the gallows a young woman who had still the audacity to show herself among honest men's daughters as though she were not a wanton and a murderess, you stifled the charge and suffered the criminal to sneak out of the county, only lest the shadow of the crime should darken your own door-sill!"—

“ By Heavens, I will make the fellow eat his words before he’s a day older !” cried Mordaunt, shaking his clenched hand in uncontrollable exasperation at this infamous accusation. — And by the troubled countenance of Reresby, it was easy to perceive the difficulty he found in restraining similar indications of rage. —

“ At any other moment than the present,” added Mrs. Mordaunt, unwilling to excite further resentment, yet painfully aware that the *whole* truth ought to be disclosed to her husband and son, “ I am convinced that, saving among the class from which he appears to derive information, his labourers and servants, Mr. Cromer would not have obtained so much as a hearing for his insinuations. — But for the last few weeks, political animosities have run so high in this county, and more especially in this neighbourhood, that a few of his auditors who fancied themselves aggrieved by the triumph of Free Trade, were

disposed to believe any harm or wickedness of its apostles.—I grieve to add that this man's slanderous hints did not receive the rebuke we had a right to expect.”—

“On the contrary,” interposed Matilda, her voice thrilling with indignation,—“many applauded,—and *all* approved!”—

“Yet I *ought* to have friends at Basinghill,” mused Mordaunt.—“The railroad has avowedly doubled the value of land there; and the village school-houses were erected at my cost!”—

“What considerations of gratitude or duty, my dear father, are ever found to weigh against party virulence!”—demanded Resby. “The monopolists would, I verily believe, burn—*not* in effigy,—but in the flesh,—every living being that has assisted in knocking off the last rivet of our feudal chains!”—

“To do the Basinghill people justice,” rejoined his sister,—“Mr. Cromer won chiefly on their minds by one of those plausible pieces

of claptrap, which,—to our shame, or honour, be it spoken—are apt to touch the chord of every human heart. In attacking the equity of my father and his brother, he declared that, had *he* been the examining magistrate in the affair of Deasmill, instead of stifling inquiry as *they* have done, he would have sifted the matter honestly to the bottom,—even though it involved the credit, nay, the very life of a child of his own.”—

“He said so, did he?” said Mordaunt, drawing his lips closer together.—“Good!—The words may still be brought home to him!—The business is not yet at rest.”—

A single glance of Reresby’s anxious eyes towards his father seemed to require further explanation!—But Mrs. Mordaunt was already resuming her narrative.

“Do not fancy, my dear husband,” said she, “that *such* words were the worst uttered by Mr. Cromer!—What I have told you is a mere preliminary to proceedings which have

struck, I fear, a death-blow to our poor friend at the Rectory!—After the Basinghill meeting, the Squire returned home, on foot, followed by two or three of his tenants, and accompanied by several persons from the Northampton side of the county, whom he had induced to attend the meeting; — among others, Vickers, the attorney, who has been the chief instigator of his hostilities towards *us*; — *all* heated by wrangling over party matters, and the refreshment they had taken.”—

“ Or, in other words,” interrupted her son, “ their heads hot with drink, and their hearts with hatred !”—

“ When, unluckily, on reaching Basingwood, where it slopes towards Deasmill,— they caught sight at a distance of two females; who at sight of them attempted concealment. This excited attention; and the poor girls were too eagerly followed not to be detected; when, alas! on coming up with them, the Squire had the double mortification of dis-

covering in the fugitives his daughter and his niece."

"But why mortification?" — demanded Mordaunt. "Is it so great a crime for two young girls to enjoy a summer walk in the woods, this sultry weather?"

"You forget that all intercourse between the cousins had been rigorously interdicted. Profiting by her uncle's absence with the Basinghill Protectionists, it seems Emma had contrived to appoint a meeting with his daughter."

"For which I alone am accountable," interposed Reresby.—"Before she quitted London, I exacted of Emma Cromer a promise that she would see my poor dear Magdalen, and explain to her those engagements towards my father which prevented my communicating with her by letter."—

Mordaunt heaved a profound sigh. It was far from the first time he had repented having dealt so preremptorily and precipitately with his son.

“ On detecting his daughter’s act of disobedience,” resumed Mrs. Mordaunt, “ terrible was Mr. Cromer’s explosion of wrath towards her ! He was with difficulty restrained from some act of violence ; but with his niece, he dealt mercilessly,—*mercilessly* !—actually daring to apply to this dear inoffensive girl, in presence of half a dozen strangers, terms the most opprobrious in the language,—terms that should never reach a woman’s ears ;—taxing her not alone with clandestine meetings with *you*, Reresby, at old Mr. Clemson’s, under circumstances the most disgraceful,—”

It was now Mordaunt’s turn to glance anxiously towards his son.

“ But with having connived with you—I really hardly know,”—continued Mrs. Mordaunt, shuddering and turning pale—“ how to continue this story.—But it appears that this wrongheaded, wronghearted man has gathered what *he* considers circumstantial evidence, that the child so cruelly put out of

the way at Deasmill, some weeks ago, was the victim of Emma !"—

"Monstrous!"— indignantly exclaimed Mordaunt and his son, at one and the same moment.

"But surely," continued the elder, "*surely* the former part of Cromer's accusations extorted from his daughter some sort of explanation?"

"As soon as his violence would allow her to be heard!—But, for some time, there was no getting him to listen to her declaration that it was *herself*, and not her cousin, who had met you at Clemson's;—that the mourning dress of a similar form, worn by both, must have misled his informant,—which was the more likely as the Squire's daughter was known never to set foot in Deasmarsh, or indeed to quit the grounds of Cromer Hall."

"And when he heard this honest avowal?"

"He either disbelieved or affected to disbelieve it; pretending that, in a fit of Quixotism,

or hoping to disarm him, Magdalen was taking her cousin's delinquencies upon herself.—So far from abating a word of his accusations, irritated by what he called his daughter's insolent interference, he proceeded sneeringly to declare that if ever again he detected her in communication with the wretched girl who had disgraced his family name, he would himself instigate such further investigations of the Deasmill business, at the Quarter Sessions, as would drive out of the country both her and the fine folks who held their head as high at Deasmarsh as though they had never been chapmen and dealers elsewhere."

"Unfortunate man!"—was the temperate rejoinder of Mordaunt. "If he only knew that, over his own homestead, the sword of justice hangs suspended by a single hair!"

"And Emma?"—demanded Reresby, addressing his mother with anxious solicitude; —"Emma, whom I know to be everything that is generous and spirited, how did

she find courage to sustain this insolent calumny?"—

“ She found it in the firmness with which her cousin, regardless of her father’s wrath,—regardless of the presence of so many witnesses,—persisted in denouncing *herself* as the guilty person ;—guilty of the Deasmill meetings ;—guilty of having broken her father’s interdictions. With respect to the murdered child, she said, (and *then* alone her voice faltered !)—it was a mystery still in the hands of God ; who, in His own good time, would bring the guilty to justice. But she declared that, as she stood in His fearful presence, neither Emma nor herself had more concern in it than as regarded their abhorrence of the crime.”—

“ Right !—good !—Well-felt, and well-expressed !” cried Mordaunt, with an approving nod. “ And what said the brute to her vindication ?”—

“ Just what might have been expected of

a man whose fevered brains were doubly excited by a fatiguing walk in harvest weather ; —swore that she was as bad as her cousin and a disgrace to her family. Had not one of the persons present, a degree more decent or more sober than the rest, interfered for Miss Cromer's protection, she would have been ignominiously driven home by her father, like a beast of burthen. — But this man, (the father of a family) afforded her his arm and protection back to the Hall."

" And to think that one cannot this very moment withdraw my poor Magdalen from the tyranny of such a monster !" —cried Reresby, starting from his place.—

" As to poor little Emma," continued Mrs. Mordaunt,—“ you will readily conceive in what a state of mind she reached the Rectory.—On hearing only a thousandth part of what had occurred; her father rushed off to the Hall; and the interview between the brothers was, I fear, of a nature terrible

to think of. For, in the course of an hour, Jacob was brought back, scarcely sensible, in his brother's carriage; and medical aid soon arrived, sent for express by the Squire."—

"And they actually think him in danger?"—

"Not in danger of *death*. But Dr. Palliser declares that his mind has received a shock the result of which cannot for some time be determined."

"So excellent,—so inoffensive a creature—to be sacrificed to the rampant cruelty of that ill-conditioned wretch!"—exclaimed Matilda.

"What grieves me more than all," observed Mordaunt, with glistening eyes, "is the share we have, if not innocently, certainly *unintentionally*, had in the business!"

"Innocently, — *innocently*, — my dear father!" cried Matilda.—"When did *you* ever commit a wilful wrong to any living soul?"—

"I trust not. But, according to the com-

mon lot of sinful human nature, my dear child, I am not proof against the influence of my prejudices. Incited by *them*, I have, perhaps, suffered myself to remain blind, when clear-sightedness was a duty ; and supine, when it became me to be active. I fear that, while still in hopes of breaking Reresby's engagement, I was guilty of slight and unkindness towards the uncle and cousin of Magdalen !—I did not see my way clearly,—I *would* not see my way clearly !—Everything connected with the name of Cromer had become hateful to me !”—

And by their silence and downcast looks, his wife and daughter seemed to admit that they “stood accountant for as great a fault.”

“And now, my dear boy, let us hurry off to the Rectory, and ascertain what it is in our power to do towards aiding and comforting the friends we have treated so scurvily !”—said Mordaunt, rising in haste.—

Nor was there much avail in Mrs. Mor-

daunt's assurances that, having been sent for by Emma the moment after her father's return from the Hall, she had afforded the poor girl all the kindness and assistance of which she stood in need.—

“I slept there that night,” added Mrs. Mordaunt; — “and it was from the dear girl's own lips I extracted all I have related. Conceiving herself to be under a promise of secrecy to Reresby, there were still some reserves; and the letter I forwarded to my son by the train, this afternoon, contained, I suspect, an entreaty to be released from her pledges; and a prayer that Magdalen might be vindicated without loss of time by the most ample explanations.”—

“And I can tell you, Master Reresby,” added Mordaunt, “that to have kept your secret under such temptations, demonstrates an almost Spartan courage,—an almost Spanish sense of honour!—True-hearted little Emma!—When I think of all the good feel-

ing she has made proof of, I feel in some danger of becoming faithless to my daughter-in-law!"—

- “We had not been ten minutes returned from the Rectory,” resumed Mrs. Mordaunt, “when you so unexpectedly made your appearance just now. I left the invalid dozing; and Emma, though anxious, composed. Believe me, Mordaunt, you had better not disturb them to-night!—Besides, you have not dined. Wait, at all events, till you have had some dinner.”—

But even dinner, that most eloquent of special pleaders, failed to convince the travellers that, however weary or hungry, they had a right to postpone, by a single moment, the expression of their sympathy.

Off they started across the park ;—instinctively following the path towards the East Lodge suggested by Mrs. Mordaunt on the day when their earnest colloquy close to Deasmill had convinced spy Drewe, who bore

the tale straight to his employer, that the two fathers were plotting together the surest mode of enabling the two delinquents, whose honour was so dear to them, to evade the detection of justice.—

CHAPTER XXV.

O my dear father !—Restoration ! hang
Thy med'cine on my lips ; and let this kiss
Repair thy violent harms.

SHAKSPEARE.

Had the widow of the late celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton witnessed the greeting between the Honourable Member for Castle Dangan and her niece, she would doubtless have decided that Mr. Mordaunt's errand at Deaswold Rectory could only be to solicit her hand for his son : more especially as the worthy cotton-spinner addressed her as his " dear child," and could hardly refrain from tears, on seeing the alteration which a few days of intense misery had wrought in her appearance.

For if the Mordaunts had bitterly reviled themselves for the diminution of their neighbourly attentions to Jacob Cromer, what were the self-upbraidings of his daughter!—When she saw him brought home speechless, with only sufficient consciousness remaining to press her hand while she assisted to place him in the bed from which perchance he never more might rise, she fell upon her knees beside it, and prayed for forgiveness; — *not* of her father, the father who knew not how to take offence;—but that Father who is in Heaven, and in whose hand Vengeance abides!—

For how careless had she become of late of *him* whose care for *her* was unceasing!—How much had she suffered her interest for other people to interfere with her filial love! How composedly had she borne being parted from him!—Yet *he*—the moment he heard of an injury wrought against his child, had suffered such anguish that the very fountain-head of his life was stirred!—He was

dying of the mere agony of hearing her traduced !

Without surmising how long the sorrow of seeing her affections estranged from him, and the fear that grief might be in store for her, had been sapping his springs of life,—without dreaming what emotions had been swelling his warm heart, while, with seeming abstraction, he watched her so pre-engrossed and so ungrateful,—one thing was clear,—that her uncle's charge against her had broken his heart !—

All the tenderness lavished by that good father on her happy childhood, now came back upon her mind ; all the instruction patiently imparted,—all the indulgence accorded to her girlish faults,—all the partial measure of their household comforts assigned exclusively to herself !—His frequent and fond recurrence to the memory of her mother, untimely taken from him, by which he had endeavoured to train her up to excellence and

soften her heart towards himself, brought reminiscences of the time when, during her repining after Reresby, (the momentary idol of her girlhood's fancy) he had redoubled his almost womanlike thoughtfulness for her comfort. Without hesitation, he had torn himself from his duties and fireside, to alienate her heart from its folly !—

And what had she given him in return for all this?—Divided affection,—lukewarm duty, an unobservant eye,—an unthankful heart !— She had dared to treat the man who was so good,—nay, so *great*, in the nature of his functions, the fervour of his faith, the simplicity of his mind and blamelessness in the sight of God and man,—as an object secondary to herself !—

No wonder that, in spite of the assuaging kindness of Mrs. Mordaunt and Matilda, the poor girl's pillow had remained sleepless since her father's melancholy seizure ; or rather, that her pillow she had never seen—for

she still kept watch by his bedside with the zeal of the most devoted of nurses.—For, though apparently unconscious, he recognised her. Something of a smile brightened his sunken face whenever she bent over him; and once or twice, when incoherent words or a faint whisper escaped his lips, and his medical attendants drew near to interpret what they hoped might be the expression of a wish or suggestion of a remedy, his solicitude invariably related to “Emma.” He was afraid his poor little daughter would over-fatigue herself by her attendance.

One comfort indeed she had experienced, greater than even the friendly sympathy of Deasmarsh. The moment it transpired in the village that the Rector was dangerously ill, the reaction of popular justice suddenly placed him before his parishioners in the light in which he formerly stood,—as the most active, humane, and benignant of parish priests. Those who had stood firm in their

reverence towards one who not only taught them all that was best and holiest, but practised what he preached, hurried off to the Rectory to inquire, condole, and tender their aid. But even such as had been led away by partizanship to the Squire into an over-credulous belief of his brother's unworthiness, if they did not already recant, stood aloof and shamefaced, while all around them vied in proclaiming the charities and good neighbourhood of the friend they were about to lose.

"There may be two minds," said Farmer Richards, the oracle of the blacksmith's shop, (who, since the repeal of the Corn Laws, had abstained from touching his hat to his landlord,) "there may perhaps be two minds about the good this parish has gained from the stir and fever and commotioning of having a man of capital settle down amongst us.—But there ben't but *one*,—or there oughtn't to be but *one*,—about the loss we should have

in changing our good, steady, God-fearing parson, who was born and has lived among us and feels for us all as if one of ourselves, against e'er another in the land of Squire Cromer's providing."—

At present, however, if Dr. Palliser's opinion were to be relied on, the Squire's nomination was not likely to be in request. The sick man had rallied.—Copious bleeding, combined with strong restoratives, had given new impetus to the paralyzed functions of nature. His senses were comparatively restored; and no objection being made by the medical attendants to Mordaunt's earnest desire for a sight of the sufferer, he was admitted to the bedside.—A feeble cry, that burst as from the heart of poor Jacob when his really attached neighbour gave loose to his feelings of sympathy, denoted perfect consciousness of the presence of a friend.

A moment afterwards, however, he recurred to his customary call for "Emma;" and,

when he saw, as she pressed forward to answer him, the affectionate,—the almost paternal manner in which she was supported by Mordaunt, a smile of joy irradiated his face. His daughter,—his calumniated daughter,—the daughter he was about to leave,—would not be friendless when he was gone!—

“All this is heart-breaking work, Reresby!” said Mordaunt to his son, when, after more than an hour’s sojourn at the Rectory, they took their way leisurely back across the Park, in the delicious stillness of a July night,—the dews fragrant around them, and the evening star trembling over them, as though at finding itself alone in that vast firmament. “I would fain have had the epoch of your marriage unclouded by a single care! And, alas!

sorrows come not single spies,

But in battalions—

If we lose this good man, Reresby, never, never shall I forgive myself!”—

"We shall *not* lose him, my dear father. Palliser promises us that he will do well!" cried the young man. — "Providence will spare him to the prayers of so many by whom he is valued. His constitution has undergone a sad shock; but his health was previously robust." —

"No,—I thought poor Jacob ailing when he was down here nearly a month ago." —

"Out of spirits,—not out of *health*!" —

"At all events, you will admit that his illness is a sad kill-joy!" —

"And I am the more grieved at it, from my unintentional share in his vexations. But, (forgive me, father,) the thought uppermost in my mind on returning to Deaswold is and *must* be Magdalen!—Magdalen has suffered nearly as much as her uncle." —

"*Too* true, alas!—for, as the time approaches for my explanation with John Cromer, I shrink from the task, as from coming in contact with a reptile!" —

"If in the first instance you were to write to him?"—

"Still, interviews must follow!"—

"At all events, surely it would be better to break the ice by a letter, asking for the hand of his daughter. *That* prospect might perhaps reduce the wild beast to a milder mood, and prepare him to receive you with decency."—

"But I have first other explanations to insist upon.—I must have justice rendered to Emma and her father!"—said Mordaunt, in a tone almost reproving,—so much of egotism did he perceive in Reresby's evident conviction that the world might be swallowed up by an earthquake, provided Magdalen were safe!

"But, if you visit him early to-morrow morning, as you propose," argued his son, "you will find him still surrounded by the people drawn hither by the Basinghill meeting:—more especially that pestilent attorney—"

"Never mind the pestilent attorney!" said

his father, as at that moment they reached his own hall-door, cheerful with its sun-like lamps and prompt attendance.—“*Fiat Justitia*, Reresby !—And now, let us sup and to bed ; that we may be astir early to-morrow, in order to contend with these manifold vexations.”—

Early astir he was ; and, before the dew was off the grass, had visited the Rectory to satisfy himself that the doctor’s prediction of an easier night had been verified.—“ The sick man was still asleep.”—No better answer could have been given. Milnward, too, had made his appearance, obedient to the summons despatched to him ; and it was good to know that the office of the poor Rector was thus satisfactorily supplied.

Mordaunt was a little vexed that, even on his return from the Rectory, nor son nor daughter was present to meet him at the breakfast-table. For, how was he to guess that Matilda and her brother had sat up a couple of hours after the rest of the family

retired to rest, discussing the prospects of both? With the utmost patience did Miss Mordaunt listen to her brother's somewhat lengthy account of himself;—the momentary liking for Emma which had preceded his heart-felt attachment to her cousin,—and the momentary liking for Lady Belvedere, which might perchance have rendered him faithless to Magdalen, had not the Rector and his daughter so opportunely made their appearance in London to re-Deaswoldize his heart. When he described how Emma's account of her cousin's distress of mind, her gentle submission and devoted affection, to say nothing of her intelligence, loveliness, goodness and truth, had revived in his bosom its partially effaced impressions, his sister could not but admire, not alone his own frankness in the avowal, but the self-denying generosity of his informant.

But, if Matilda proved a patient auditress, she expected to be listened to in her turn, when it *came* to her turn to relate the story

of her own true love. As yet, she had not breathed a word to either of her parents of Sir Herbert Glynne's offer of his hand. But it was not exactly necessary for Reresby to wait the event of Jacob Cromer's convalescence, to be informed of the probability of his having to love as a brother-in-law the man so long treasured as his friend.

"Glynne?—Herbert Glynne?—Herbert in love with *you*—and *you* in love with Herbert?" cried he.—"Impossible, impossible!—You want to ascertain what degree of elasticity my credulity has acquired from the recent surprises to which I have been exposed!—But *this* is a thing I *must* have found out, had it existed!—You may as well attempt to persuade me that you have thoughts of becoming Mrs. Aristobulus Settringham!"—

"Thank you, my dear Reresby, for the standard of comparison you assign to Sir Herbert!—But time will show that nothing is more true—"

"Than that you rejected George Melfont and the coronet hovering over his head for the sake of my friend Glynne?"—

"And that my refusal of papa's proposal to take a house in town for my coming out, during the year you were both in the East, had precisely the same origin!"—

"There's a girl for you!"—cried Reresby, extending his hand and giving his sister's a hearty shake.—"And yet, Matty, there would have been more philosophy in what I always imagined your motive for declining a season in town, *i. e.* your dislike of having to choose between living among great people who looked down upon you, and little people, on whom you looked down!"—

"It was from my heart I derived my counsel, not my head!"

"And with this mutual attachment (which Glynne writes, and *you* declare to have existed ever since the days when you used to play at catscradle together in holiday time at Burtsmill) you were both so intensely stupid as not

to come to an understanding on the subject, when he was staying here last year?"—

"Even so, my dear brother!—But we were both sand-blind with jealousy."

"Blockheads!—*He*, of course, of that lump of aristocratic clay, George Melfont, — or rather of Melfont Park and its beautiful avenues,—the glory of the shire!—But of whom on earth were *you* jealous, Matilda?—Not a spinster save yourself and the two *pois chiches* of old maids at Basinghill, within ten miles of Deaswold!"

"Emma Cromer is much obliged to you!"

"*Emma* again?—you were actually jealous of poor little Emma?—*You*, Miss Mordaunt of Deasmarsh, with thirty thousand pounds and a face and figure that might sit for the portrait of Calypso? Fie, fie upon you!"—

"I deserve to be laughed at,—but I am not sure that I can bear it!"—

"Confess at least that Emma's fate is somewhat extraordinary!—By nature the most harmless and insignificant of God's

creatures, she has not only been subject to infamous imputations from which the worst turpitude would recoil:—but an object of jealousy, at one and the same moment, to yourself and Lady Belvedere! It would not much surprise me to hear next that Ibrahim Pasha had bid a few millions of piastres for her, to carry her off to the land of crocodiles; where, by the by, she might run against George Melfont botanizing in the Delta; and, after exciting the envy of a whole harem, become an English viscountess at last!”—

“What will Magdalen say, my dear brother, if you talk so much about Emma?”

“If she be wise, that it is a proof how very much more I *think* about Magdalen!”

“And what am *I* to say to your talking so little about ‘Matty?’—I *had* hoped that the prospect of brotherhood with your friend would have been more welcome!”

“If I could only look upon it as among the possibilities of things!—But were you to tell me that my father had asked to be

knighted, — or that Pillicock of Pillicock Hill, old Cromer, had subscribed to the Cobden testimonial,—I would believe it sooner than that, in this world of contradiction and contrariety, two people so perfectly assorted to each other as you and Glynne, were likely to come together in wedlock!”—

“How is such an infidel to be convinced! At least, promise me that, when I break the matter to my father, you will support our cause?”

“It will need no supporting, Matty!—What better could your family desire for you than to become the wife of a man possessing high principles, intelligence, character, competence of fortune, and distinction of birth?”—

“They may desire nothing *better*, perhaps; but something *different*!—Papa has set his heart on establishing me within reach of Deasmarsh.”

“At Melfont Park, of course. But that question you long ago negatived. And though my father may still desire the renewal of

George's proposals, surely he has given abundant proof, within these last few days, that the strongest of his personal prejudices are secondary to the wishes of his children? After his consenting to *my* union with the daughter of the Squire, no fear of his opposing *yours* with my friend Glynne,—the only thing wanting to perfect my own happiness!—Think what pleasant times we shall have of it, Matty! When you are tired of visiting us at Deasmarsh, we shall go over and see you in Ireland. Glynne has a famous salmon-leap at his Castle Rackrent,—the very thing for the Easter holidays!"

Matilda could hardly refrain from a smile at the mercurial nature of his projects.

"And in time," continued he, setting her raillery at defiance, "poor old Burtsmill will come to be included in our round of visits. For Tom, be it known to you, lady fair! has done the duty of a younger brother, by taking the fair Claudia off my hands; and my father has such unlimited influence over her uncle,

that I have little fear of the old gentleman's consent to their marriage."

"And I promise you, dear Reresby, that, however unacceptable to you as a wife, you will like her of all things as a sister-in-law!—You never saw a more good-humoured, amiable, grateful little girl."

"And even if less than perfection, I am bound to approve of her as Mrs. Thomas Mor-daunt, considering how unwilling she has shown herself to let her fair hand and her hundreds of thousand pounds go out of the family!—And I should have been loth to see the last of Burtsmill, Matty;—Burtsmill, where we were born and bred;—Burtsmill, which not only made us, but made us *happy*!—The old factory will always be as dear to *me* as the Castle of Hapsburg to the House of Austria!"—

Engaged in such pleasant reminiscences and glowing anticipations, no wonder that the minutes slipped by, till the small hours of the night almost grew again into the signal

for work-a-day duties.—On the whole, however, Mordaunt was not sorry to enjoy his breakfast *tête-à-tête* with his wife;—that wise and sober-minded partner of his useful existence, whose early frugality had done so much towards securing the prosperity they were now enabled to turn to such good account.—It was a consolation to talk with *her* over their children!—And to *her* he did not scruple to avow that the cup of sweets which Reresby found so palatable, had for *him* a grievous flavour of hyssop. As the time approached, indeed, for him to proceed to Cromer Hall, he extended his hand to her in silence, as though requiring the support of the being dearest to him on earth, at a moment so trying.

On rising from the breakfast-table, he was glad to find that obstacles still retarded his departure.—An absence of some days from home had caused a world of business to accrue upon his hands;—justice-business,—farming-business, — parish-business ; — com-

plaints of the injured,—claims of the poor,—and appeals to the Briarean power of the Man of Capital.—For the wealth of Mordaunt ran like molten gold in the languid veins of the district.—Without *him*, the industrious could not work, the naked could not be clothed, nor the hungry fed.—His provident mind created fields for enterprise and occupation for idleness, as well as shelter for those invalidated by decay of nature for providing for themselves.

But, after an hour spent in his justice-room in conferring with the courtiers in smock-frocks, and cabinet ministers with accout-books in their hands, who waited anxiously at his levee, his mind felt all the better prepared for his task. Business was to the active-minded Mordaunt like contact with his mother-earth to Antæus.—It was *there* he felt his value.—It was there he understood his own usefulness.—It was there he measured, by the level from which he had risen, the height to which he had raised him-

self!—If ever, for a moment, he felt proud, it was when surrounded by humble petitioners, who appealed to him with all the greater security of sympathy and aid, from knowing him to have been once as themselves.—

With a renovated mind, accordingly, he took staff in hand, to cut across the park by Deasmill towards Cromer Hall;—an inauspicious road,—but the shortest by a mile; and he had no mind to loiter by the way.

As long as his foot was on his own land, his thoughts remained absorbed by the complex interest of his errand.—But, no sooner than, after crossing the green lane, he entered the grounds of the Lord of the Manor,—his adversary,—his foe,—his antagonist in courts of law as in the decencies of private life,—the sensation so new to him of being a trespasser, took possession of him, body and soul.—

There was something so bewildering in suddenly traversing a path, within sight of Deas-

marsh, whereof all the country round was familiar to him as his glove, yet where all was nevertheless strange and new,—that for a moment he felt dizzy by the altered aspect of distant objects, viewed in a light in which he saw them for the first time.—The spire of Deaswold Church seemed to have changed its place ; and when, from a higher level of the hill, he beheld the smoke and flame of a locomotive skimming like a flying dragon the valley below, he seemed to become suddenly aware of the proximity of the railroad, which to Deasmarsh was invisible ; and of the change his intervention had wrought in the aspect of the country.—

While panting up that steep and naked hill, he could *almost* understand the envious grudge cherished by Cromer Hall against the pleasant shadiness of Deasmarsh.

The Squire was “at home.”—Unprepared for such an astounding event as Mordaunt’s visit, the bumpkin who answered the hall-bell ushered the stranger into the cheerless study

which afforded as curious a contrast to the Deasmarsh library as the arid hill-side to the green slopes of its park;—and having received his card, proceeded in search of “master.”—

“No man having the least claim to the character of an English gentleman would insult another under his own roof,” had been Mordaunt’s reflection, as he crossed the enemy’s threshold;—and he was justified in his belief that a visit so frankly proffered could not be absolutely refused, by the speedy appearance of Mr. Cromer.

Not, however, unaccompanied.—The Squire was followed by a duck-legged scrubby little man, who, though not formally introduced to the visitor, took a seat near him, with so much the air of one who came prepared to be a professional witness of whatever might occur in the interview, that Mordaunt had no hesitation in setting him down as the “pestilential attorney.”—

The Squire, indeed, was still so com-

pletely under the influence of amazement at Mordaunt's arrival, that he had not collected the scattered forces of his mind to meet the enemy. — He was *almost* civil! — He almost forgot that the stranger within his gates was the detested Man of Capital, and *he* the shrunken, defeated, humiliated Lord of the Manor, — the crestfallen master of Cromer Hall! —

CHAPTER XXVI.

'Tis thus the spirit of a single mind
Makes that of multitudes take one direction ;
As roll the waters to the breathing wind,
Or roams the herd beneath the bull's protection.
BYRON.

“ I have the pleasure of acquainting you, Mr. Cromer, that the news from the Rectory this morning is highly satisfactory,”—said Mordaunt,—unwilling to break at once into the matter of his visit.—“ The patient passed a good night. When I called there at nine o'clock, he was still asleep.”—

Not an inch did the Squire relax from the rigid perpendicularity of his spare figure at this intimation ;—nor did the puckers of his mean face, so different from the lines of thought ploughed by time and reflection in the brows of nobler-minded men, indicate

the slightest sympathy in the information afforded.—

“You must be aware, sir,” said he,—reply of some sort being inevitable,—“that Mr. Jacob Cromer and myself are not on terms to make his health a matter of much interest in this house.”—

A rejoinder concerning the indissoluble tie of fraternal relationship rose to the lips of Mordaunt.—But he forbore.—His errand was one of conciliation.—

“You are, I fear, surprised at my intrusion into a house where I have little reason to suppose myself a welcome guest,” he resumed, after a moment’s pause.—“But finding, sir, that in matters of some moment, in which your family and my own are equally concerned, you have been misled by false representations, and have acted under erroneous impressions—”

The little duck-legged attorney moved restlessly in his chair.—

“I have considered it my duty, both as a father and a magistrate,—I wish I could add as a neighbour,—to wait upon you; in order

to place the case fairly before you, and leave it to your own candour to make such admissions of misconception as you may think proper.”—

“ My opinions on the subject in question were grounded upon facts known to the whole county, sir ; and, on all occasions, I express them unflinchingly, as it becomes an honest man to do,” said the Squire, who was gradually overcoming his panic of surprise, and recollecting that he was face to face with Mordaunt of Deasmarsh. — “ If any body, gentle or simple, be disposed to call me to account for them,—here I am !”—

“ No one is accountable for having been led into error,” replied Mordaunt, unresentingly. “ It is only those who, after being enlightened, *persist* in asserting what they know to be untrue, who are bound to answer for their words !”—

“ Later or sooner, I am quite ready to answer for mine !” persisted the Squire,—who seemed to court an affront, with the view of justifying retaliation.—

“ The explanations I am desirous mean-

while of making to you, Mr. Cromer, and in the most friendly spirit, are of so confidential a nature," resumed Mordaunt, glancing towards the anonymous auditor,—“that—”

“*That* gentleman, sir,” interrupted the Squire, “is not only my friend, but my man of business. Whatever you may have to say to me, would be so immediately communicated to him, that it is better he should hear it at once from yourself.”—

“In that case,” resumed Mordaunt,—“though for both our sakes I had rather our interview were private,—I must waive all further delicacy.—I understand, sir, you have been informed, and have publicly repeated, that, between your niece Emma and my son, there exists a connection unacknowledged to their parents and discreditable to both—”

“I have asserted—because I know it from eye-witnesses to be *true*,—that they were in the habit of meeting daily, last year, in the deserted millworks adjoining Clemson’s cottage,”—rejoined the Squire, with an air of surly determination. — “And I say again, that if one of my labourers were found with a

parish girl under the same circumstances, I would not give much for her character!"—

It was so urgent to prevent the Squire from committing himself by further violence on the subject, that Mordaunt hastened to the point.

"I conceive that nothing in my conduct since I have been a resident in this neighbourhood entitles you, Mr. Cromer, to doubt my word," said he; "and I now give it to you, as a Christian and a gentleman, that your niece never, on any one single occasion, met my son at Deasmill.—They had, in fact, no temptation to such a rendezvous; being at ample liberty to meet wherever they thought proper, beginning with their own houses."—

A bitter and almost audible sneer (timidly emulated by the professional witness,) was all the reply vouchsafed.

"So much in vindication of one of the best and most modest girls in the kingdom!"—resumed Mordaunt with spirit. — "But, as regards my son, so far from attempting to defend *his* conduct, I freely admit that he *was* in the habit of frequenting Clemson's

premises, for the purpose of meeting one whom it was impossible for him to see elsewhere, and who was probably mistaken for the young lady so unjustly accused.”—

“No doubt a substitute has by this time been provided!” retorted the Squire, with a scornful toss of the head. “Some wretched girl, willing to take upon herself, for certain considerations, the misdemeanours of Miss Emma Cromer!”—

“You would scarcely say so, sir, did you surmise the situation in life and irreproachable character of her to whom I allude,” remonstrated Mordaunt; “a young lady belonging to one of the first families in the neighbourhood,” added he,—trusting to let gradual light into the mind of the Squire, and prevent too sudden a shock.

“There is but one young lady, saving your own daughter and mine, living within ten miles of Deaswold,” cried the Squire;—“and *that* is Miss Emma Cromer.”—

“And if,” persisted Mordaunt, “the alternative you have suggested,—if nearer to yourself than your niece,—my son had found

an object to whom his whole heart is devoted, and to whom he would fain devote every moment of his future life—”

The Squire sat as one paralyzed. He scarcely seemed to breathe.—He did not even attempt to speak.—

“Would he be altogether hopeless,” continued his agitated visitor, “of obtaining your consent to his marriage with your daughter; to whom, with the full consent of his family, he is desirous to offer his hand?”—

Still, not a word escaped the firm-set lips of Cromer.

“Mr. Mordaunt, sir,” interposed the attorney, obsequiously addressing his client, who appeared stupified, “purposes to you to terminate all further ’ostilities between the families in the ’andsomest manner, by a match betwixt Miss Magdalen and his son and heir!”—

“Magdalen!—Magdalen Cromer, meet a man unknown to her family at Clemson’s mill?—A daughter of mine go skulking to underhand appointments, with a young fellow not allowed to set foot across her father’s

threshold?"—burst at length, as by the opening of a sluice-gate, from the long compressed lips of the panting Squire.—“I don’t believe it,—I won’t believe it!—’Tis an accursed and mischievous lie!—Women are bad enough,—I scarce know the one that’s to be depended on.—But that girl, who has neither seen nor known the shadow of harm,—that girl who sits composedly from morning till night, looking her mother and me full in the face,—could never, *never* be guilty of conduct such as would shame even people I could name, every drop of blood in whose veins is puddle!”—

By a generous effort, Mordaunt subdued the impulses of irascibility to which this angry outburst gave rise; trusting that, after a first explosion, the father’s wrath would subside.

“That I admit my son’s full share of culpability in this untowardly affair, Mr. Cromer,” said he, “is proved by my frank offer of all the reparation in my power. These young people have been imprudent.—Be it the better part of their parents to pardon them and make them happy!”—

“Your son—your son!”—cried Cromer, who had thrown aside all pretence at self-control,—“what is your son to *me*?—Who cares what becomes of a son of yours?—Do with him what you will—marry him to whom you please,—and let him and his wife go to the devil!—But, as regards my daughter, sir—my daughter Magdalen Cromer,—whose forefathers have been estated esquires bearing arms, in this county, for the last four hundred years, I would have you to know that, sooner than see her take up with a low-born manufacturer,—a man whose grandfather was a parish apprentice,—I’d see her lying in the grave!”—

A cold shiver thrilled through the frame of Mordaunt.—Still he forbore.—The happiness of Reresby was at stake!

“But if your daughter’s peace of mind and fair fame be endangered by your opposition to her attachment,”—pleaded he—“if the attention you have yourself drawn upon the unfortunate Deasmill affair—”

A new light seemed suddenly to startle the mind of the Squire. Darting from his seat, and throwing open the study-door, he called

aloud for his daughter, in a voice that echoed shrilly up the old-fashioned square staircase opening from the hall to the roof.—

“Let Miss Cromer know I wish to speak to her—*immediately!*” cried he to the bumpkin who, his name being “Tummas,” chose to answer to that of “Magdalen.” During which short colloquy, the attorney found time to sidle up to Mordaunt, with a suggestion that, as “the Squire’s blood was up, may be it might be better to adjourn the discussion till some more easy moment.”

“Now or never, sir!” was the firm reply. For Mordaunt had by this time seen enough of the delicacy of Mr. Cromer’s deportment, to feel that it would not do to abandon a timid and defenceless girl to the rough visitings of his rage.

A moment afterwards, Tummas put his head awkwardly into the room.—His young lady was with “Missus.”—“Missus’s compliments, and Miss Magdalen warn’t well enough to come down.”—

“We will see *that!*” cried her father,

stalking out of the room, ere Mordaunt had time to remonstrate with his intention of forcing his daughter to so painful an interview. And before he had half done expressing to the duck-legged little gentleman his trust that the proposal for her hand, which contemplated only her happiness, might not be made a pretext for mortifying and distressing her, the door was again violently thrown open, and Cromer reappeared, dragging in by the arm a beautiful, trembling, ashy-pale girl; who, but for the powerful grasp with which he upheld her, would have sunk at once to the ground.

“Sit there,—if you fancy yourself too weak to stand!”—cried he, in a hoarse voice, flinging rather than placing her in a chair.—“Nay, no whimpering!” he continued, forcing away the hands she had clasped over her face,—though her eyes remained as tearless as her lips speechless;—“but look me steadily in the face, Magdalen Cromer, while you answer, as you will at the day of judgment, whether, forgetting what is due to yourself

and your parents, you have ever given a meeting at Deasmill, or elsewhere, to young Mordaunt of Deasmarsh?"—

Poor Magdalen, who had sunk back in the high-backed chair into which she had been flung, sat with her eyes fixed despairingly upon her father, as if prepared for implicit obedience. But her powers of speech were palsied.

"Answer me, child!"—reiterated her father—again griping her arm, "answer me at once! Do not expose me to the shame of hearing you falsely accused by these Deasmarsh people, without affording me right and title to tell them that they lie in their throats!"—

"Mr. Cromer!"—shouted Mordaunt,—starting from his place. But in a moment, the attorney crept between his patron and the exasperated guest, as if to prevent a hostile collision.—

"Enable me," continued the unappeased Squire, "to tell the person before us that his son is as contemptible in *your* eyes as in mine;—that you neither know nor want to know

him;—and that, sooner than become his wife, you would marry Vickers there,—or—no matter whom,—the greatest scamp in the county!—Speak, Madge!—Have you suddenly become an idiot?—Are you or are you *not* acquainted with Mr. Mordaunt's son?"—

"I am, sir."

"And you have met him at Deasmill?"

Magdalen attempted to speak. But her lips quivered without articulating a syllable.

"You *have*!—I see it in your confounded face!"—cried Cromer, clenching his fist. But as he advanced menacingly towards her, Magdalen flung herself out of her chair at his feet,—embracing his knees,—perhaps, to excite his pity,—perhaps, to secure herself from his rage.—

"There must be an end of this, sir," said Mordaunt, firmly interposing.—"If you are capable of exercising unmanly violence against this feeble girl, *I* will not stand by to witness it."

And while he endeavoured to raise Miss Cromer from the ground and replace her on a seat, Vickers exerted himself to represent,

aside to his client, the danger of exposing to the enemy so much of his family history.

“And what part of my family history has he not contrived to make his own?”—cried the Squire aloud, disdaining all attempts at concealment.—“What part of my property has he not contrived to injure?—He came from his blackguard factory, a stranger into this parish, (where, for ages and ages, my family had been as kings in the land,) and trampled upon me with his upstart pretensions at consequence. My life has been made a burthen to me through his settlement in the parish; and, when my head is laid in the grave, the Deaswold I leave behind will be no more like the Deaswold in which I was born, than though it were foreign ground. —All this is his doing—all, his *accursed* doing! —Not content with which, he must needs plant his foot on my own hearthstone, and prove to me that my daughter is a wanton!”—

So far from listening to this outrageous apostrophe, Mordaunt was exerting himself to soothe with fatherly kindness the trembling young woman, whose distress of mind was

relieved by a burst of tears, on finding herself so tenderly entreated by the father of Reresby.

“ But this I beg him to understand,” continued the Squire, still talking of Mordaunt as though he were not present,—“ that I would as soon have my blood mix with that of the hangman, as with that of a Manchester cotton-spinner ; and that, if Magdalen Cromer do but exchange another word with his puppy of a son,—out of my doors she goes—at once, and for ever !”—

“ And thank GOD she is no longer ignorant,” added Mordaunt with spirit, folding her hand kindly within his own, “ that, for the future, mine are open to receive her !—As the wife of my son, fondly will she be cherished at Deasmarsh !”—

“ Then let her choose between us at once !” cried the Squire—suffocated with rage.—“ If she *wants* to leave her father’s house, let her go, and be damned !—Nobody wishes to detain her.”—

While poor Magdalen was uplifting her clasped hands entreatingly towards her

father for pity and forbearance, her brother Stephen suddenly made his appearance. Having caught the sound of the Squire's voice at its highest pitch of frenzy, as he entered the hall-door and learned from Tumbas that Mr. Mordaunt was the guest by whom it was provoked, he probably judged the occasion a good one to conciliate his father by playing the bully in his behalf.—

“What is all this row about, sir?” cried he, startled at finding his sister included in the group. “I trust, father, no one has been wanting in respect to you or Madge?”

“It is your sister herself who is wanting in respect to me!” said the Squire, quieted, as a wild beast is sometimes quieted, by contact with its cub.—“Will you believe it, Stephen? After all we have heard of that infamous affair at Deasmill, (for which, as Vickers was saying only last night, some one might yet swing,) the jade whom Ralph Drewe watched so often into hiding was no other than yonder sweet-spoken young lady;—before whom, forsooth, your mother has often

chidden me for alluding to so indelicate a subject!"—

"But you do not, I hope, sir, pretend to connect the interviews between Miss Cromer and my son with the dreadful crime accidentally associated with the scene of their meeting?"—cried Mordaunt, with just indignation.

"I *do* connect the poor urchin found in the Deas with the young libertine of whom you choose to talk as though he were Prince of Wales!" retorted the Squire;—"and for more reasons than one.—How came it, pray, (as I was saying t'other day at Basinghill to my friend Settringham,) how came it that the girl Hakewill, whom Hilshere the turnpikeman positively swore at the inquest he had seen skulking at nightfall towards the spot where the body was found, having in her hand a bundle tied in a handkerchief the colour and pattern of the piece found round the neck of the child,—how came she, I say, to disappear out of the village of Deaswold, with her mother and sister;—after repeated visits to Deasmarsh,—*after repeated visits, I say, Mr. Mor-*

daunt, to Deasmarsh ;—where she boasted of having been closeted for hours with the father of Mr. Reresby Mordaunt !”

“Where’s the good of dwelling on the subject, sir?” cried his son, sullenly, interrupting him.—“The thing is past and over. Let the hare sit!—At present, what we have to look to is, that there are two persons present here whose company is less welcome than their room.”

“Before I relieve you, young sir, from that of *one* of those to whom you allude,” said Mordaunt, assuming the stern severity of a judge, “let me request you to remove your sister from hence. What further must pass between us is unfitted for her gentle ear.”

On which hint, Magdalen herself, without waiting for her brother’s interference, rose feebly from her place, as if about to leave the room.

“Not a step, at your peril!”—cried her father, interposing betwixt her and the door. “Those who behave as you have done, Magdalen Cromer, can bear to hear what they do not scruple to act. People who are squeam-

ish only in their ears, deserve little consideration!—Sit down!”—

“As you please, sir!”—said Mordaunt, also, though unbidden, resuming his seat; his tranquil nature almost overpowered by these unseemly discords.—“My scruples were for *your* sake rather than *mine*. But I must request of you to issue orders to your *son* as well as your daughter not to quit the room!”—continued he, on discerning by a glance that the heir apparent of Cromer Hall was preparing to make off.—“I should be sorry to attack a man, however guilty, behind his back.”

On which apostrophe, the Squire motioned his son peremptorily back to his place, with the gesture of one accustomed to find his authority absolute.

“You have charged me, Mr. Cromer,” continued Mordaunt, in a firmer voice, “with having held secret communication, at my own house, with a family of the name of Hakewill; whose sudden and mysterious disappearance from Deaswold, during your brother’s absence in London, has been the origin of the more curiosity and comment, that, in the various

examinations and inquiries arising out of the finding of a dead infant in the Deas, within the bounds of my estate, these people were pointed out as objects of suspicion."

"Ay!"—interrupted the Squire—finding no better words at command than to reiterate verbatim his charge. "You won't deny, I suppose, though you took care not to send the case to the Quarter Sessions, that Hilshere the turnpikeman saw the girl Alice skulking at nightfall towards the spot where the dead boy was picked out of the mud; bearing a bundle wrapped in a handkerchief of the colour of the rag found round the neck of the strangled child!"—

"Exactly.—Such, and even stronger, was the presumptive evidence of her guilt.—Your accusation against me consequently includes no less a charge than having wilfully defeated the ends of justice, by compounding for the worst of felonies, — for manslaughter, — for *murder*!"—

"I am glad to find, sir, you understand the full drift of my meaning," said the Squire, with an insulting nod.—

“And you naturally inquire,” said Mordaunt, resuming the thread of his argument, —“what, having my eyes open, has induced me to do this?—I will tell you, sir,—tell you, at the risk of transferring to your own heart the heavy burthen you would fain fix upon mine. Because, Mr. Cromer, having visited, as an act of humanity, the cottage of these wretched Hakewills, I obtained from them, not as a magistrate but a benefactor, a full confession of the circumstances connecting them with that fatal discovery—”

Again, Stephen Cromer attempted to sneak from the room.—But it was now Mordaunt’s turn to bid him remain.

“If you wish to entitle yourself to mercy, young man,” said he, “bear your part in an explanation which may save you from more fatal exposure!”

“By what right, sir, do you pretend to give orders to my son?” cried the Squire, involuntarily resuming his bullying tone on perceiving the cowed air of Stephen.

“By the right of an upright man over a guilty one!” was the stern rejoinder. “The

handkerchief to which you have so often referred, Mr. Cromer, as attaching suspicion to the sister of poor Mary Hakewill, and which others in the parish depose to having seen in the laundry at Cromer Hall, was in truth the property of your son.”—

“*Yours?*”—cried the Squire, turning towards the young man, from whose face every particle of colour had now disappeared.—

“Nay! The child itself, Mr. Cromer, was his offspring; and if *his* were not also the crime of infanticide, it was by his advice,—by his *orders*,—that the body of the infant (which I verily believe to have died from natural causes,—the convulsions of infancy aggravated by ignorance and neglect) was deposited in the river with a stone round its neck; in order to evade the inquiries and suspicions likely to arise from its being presented for burial in consecrated ground.”

“Is this *true*, sir?”—demanded Cromer, turning to his son.—And the dead silence that pervaded the room conveyed only too full an affirmation.

“There was no help for it!” muttered Ste-

phen, raising his arm as though to ward off his father, who rushed upon him,—evidently with the intention of felling him to the earth. “What was I to do with the child?—What was I to do with the girl?—I had not a shilling of money!—I asked you for some, father, the very day the child died,—and you thrust me out of the room with a curse!—”

“But you can swear to me, before God,” exclaimed the Squire—(to do justice to whom be it said that the exposure of his own brutality weighed nothing against his present uncertainty whether the hands of his son were stained with blood-guiltiness,) “you can swear to me, Stephen, that the brat was *not* put out of the way,—that it died naturally and fairly?”—

“May I drop dead this moment before you, father, if its mother and I didn’t fret over its death as though born in honest wedlock!” cried he. “You were right, sir,”—continued he, turning, in the excitement of the moment, to Mordaunt for support. “It died of convulsions the day after its birth.”

“Then, no matter what was done to the

corpse!" exclaimed Cromer—breathing more freely.

"Such was so far my own impression, sir," resumed Mordaunt, "that, on finding the mere concealment of the birth, if proved, would condemn the unfortunate young mother to long imprisonment and hard labour, I took occasion, before it transpired that, suspicion had fallen on the wrong sister, and before the real delinquent became exposed to examination, to facilitate the departure from the country of a most unfortunate family."

A few muttered imprecations addressed by the Squire to his hopeful son, alone broke the painful silence that ensued.—Miss Cromer, with her hands crossed over her bosom, seemed endeavouring to overcome her emotions; while the attorney was probably cogitating how this alarming complication of incidents could be converted into a job.

"You will now perhaps further inquire, sir," resumed Mordaunt, gravely addressing the master of the house, "what interest induced me to interfere in behalf of strangers, at a considerable cost, and with grievous

risk to myself were my interposition only slightly misrepresented, as it was when you yourself saw fit to attribute my conduct to motives the most nefarious.”—

“Any one would have done the same, to whom such strong evidence had been afforded.”

“By one of the day-labourers on your estate!—It is not on such a source *I* should be tempted to rely, in matters involving the credit of one of my country neighbours and the honour of my niece!” rejoined Mordaunt.—“Nay, even when the guilt of your son was clearly demonstrated to me by the sight of his own letters and the confession of his accomplice, my desire that so foul a blot might not rest upon a gentleman of honourable station belonging to this parish,—above all, to the brother of one in whom, for some months past, I have trusted I beheld my future daughter-in-law,—that, consulting no one, and little suspecting how cruelly the infamy might be made to recoil upon my own family, I took such measures as effectually stifled further inquiry.”

Under an impression that the absence of

any accusing party secured him from legal prosecution, Stephen Cromer now began to exhibit symptoms of returning audacity.—“He should be glad to know,” he said, “by what right Mr. Mordaunt pretended to meddle with his concerns?—He should be glad to know what authority he had for all he had been advancing?”—

“Do not suppose that I have acted without retaining in my hands the documents necessary to my justification!” said Mordaunt.—“When necessary, I will exhibit them to your father and his man of business.—And now, sir,” continued he, turning towards the elder Cromer, “I again reiterate my request that the remainder of our interview may be confidential.”—

“No, by God!” exclaimed the Squire, the turmoil of whose mind seemed only to exacerbate his enmity.—“Say on, and say out!—Enjoy to the utmost your triumph.—Set your foot upon my neck, and grin for joy while I grovel in the dust. But *these* shall share my mortification. *These* shall hear me tell you to your face, again and again, and till the

last moment, that whatever may have been the boyish follies of my son, never will I consent to see a child of mine engrafted on your miserable stock!"—

"Then let me beg you to peruse *this*,"—said Mordaunt, taking from a pocket-book he had previously drawn from his inner pocket, a letter, over which the Squire hastily cast his eyes, as not at first comprehending his drift.—

"Robert Cromer?"—said he, as if reciting aloud the signature,—“and dated ‘Peter Hall, Cambridge?’ This is the writing of my son Bob—who has not set foot in Northamptonshire these five months!—Are you going to implicate *him* in the confounded business at Deasmill?”—

“Not in the *Deasmill* business. By taking the trouble of reading your son’s letter, Mr. Cromer, you will find it contain acknowledgments addressed to a stranger, for assistance—*pecuniary* assistance,—rendered him at a time when, having been refused it by his father, he was in distress that must have ended with expulsion from the University.—

Having been tempted, inadvertently let us *hope*,—rashly, *certainly*,—to use without sanction the name of a young friend in a money transaction, he was on the point of being taken up for embezzlement,—or (why not use the right name) for *forgery*,—when, by the timely intervention of a young man who, knowing the respectability of his connections and the grief such an event would cause to the worthy Rector of this parish, enabled him by restitution of the money to hush up the affair.”—

“I had heard some slight hint of the business, sir,” said Stephen, in reply to the haggard looks of inquiry fixed upon him by his father.—“I know that Bob had taken some imprudent step, last March; when distressed for eight hundred pounds to pay a billiard marker, from whom he had borrowed the money on a promissory note. But I did not know that Tom Mordaunt was the person who got him out of the scrape.”—

“Yes,—Mr. Cromer—my youngest son!” added Mordaunt,—firmly;—“by whom so large a sum could not have been commanded

without my seconding. The letter in your hand is one of acknowledgment for the advance.”—

“You shall be paid the amount before I am four and twenty hours older!” gasped the Squire.—“Had I known a child of mine was your debtor in so much as the value of a farthing, I would sooner have gone without food and clothing!”—

“It was not with a view to payment, sir, I placed that letter in your hand,” said Mordaunt:—even Vickers,—even the little duck-legged attorney feeling ashamed of the ungraciousness which prompted the Squire to regard only in a pecuniary light, an obligation which had probably preserved his son from transportation. “What I wish is to prove to you that, while you have been heaping injuries on my head, I and mine have, from first to last, desired to live on friendly terms with so near a neighbour,—the lord of a manor wherein is embarked so large a portion of my property and personal comfort. I came into this county, Mr. Cromer, eager to lay aside the labours of life and their

prodigious profit, for the sake of leading a quiet life in the bosom of my family, and witnessing the fructification of my toils in the happiness of those around me and the benefit of the community.—But from the very day of my arrival, sir, you strewed flints in my way, and encompassed my dwelling with a hedge of thorns!—*Why*, I know not, except from envy of the superior riches obtained by means to which a man born with *your* independence would not have deigned to stoop. Every past injury, however, I am willing to overlook and efface from my memory, as though it never had been, provided you give me in return what will be prized in my family as the greatest of treasures,—the daughter who looks as though she longed to throw herself at your feet, and ask your forgiveness and blessing.”—

“Keep off!—No *cant*,—no *hypocrisy*!”—cried the Squire, in a hoarse voice, motioning away the poor girl who, bathed in tears, was preparing to make the supplication suggested. “If she choose to marry your son,” continued he, turning towards Mordaunt, “let

her!—Take her, sir,—take her at once.—I am fallen too low to feel much pain from a humiliation the more.—As to her fortune—”

“I want no fortune,” cried Mordaunt, snatching into his arms the lovely and inoffensive being who, spurned by her unnatural family, seemed scarcely able to support herself.—“Whatever portion you intended for her can be given to the young man at Cambridge; whose imprudence has involved him, I fear, in a complication of misfortunes.”—

“If my uncle should drop, however,” observed Stephen, as if anticipating the death of the Rector as a piece of good fortune, “Bob will come into a living of a good fourteen hundred a year!”—

“Heaven preserve this parish from so great a calamity as the loss of my friend Jacob!” fervently exclaimed Mr. Mordaunt, who did not appear to reckon a tendency to forgery high among canonical virtues.—“May he live to witness a general peace-making among us!—May he live to see this neighbourhood established on a footing of friendliness and peace!”—

“If you allude to this house, sir, and those whom it contains,” growled the Squire, “in *my* opinion, it matters little what becomes of us all!—My sons are disgraced for ever!—”

“Pardon me! Nothing has transpired, or need transpire, of the circumstances which have come to our knowledge, beyond the bounds of this chamber.”

“If not disgraced in the eyes of the world, at least in their own eyes and mine!—My daughter will soon belong to those whom I thank for what they have done for my family, but whom the command of the Queen herself should never make me take by the hand. My brother and his daughter have enlisted with the enemy,—my own flesh and blood have revolted;—and had I my wish and will, I would see Cromer Hall burned to the ground, and never set foot in Northamptonshire again!”

“At present, you are under the influence, Mr. Cromer, of strong and painful impressions. Time will soften them!” said Mordaunt, rising to take leave. “That you have granted, however reluctantly, your consent to your daughter’s union with my son Reresby,

will thoroughly obliterate all those I have received during this trying interview. Should you wish to see me again, I am at your service; or Mr. Vickers can wait upon me as your representative. But that I fear you would very speedily repent having sanctioned such a measure, and that it might give rise to injurious comments," added he, again affectionately taking into his own the hands of the drooping Magdalen, "I would profit by your permission, and carry away this young lady with me at once, to those who are labouring under the utmost impatience to welcome her to their heart. But I have an intermediary measure to propose; to which no one, I should imagine, would object. Her poor little cousin is sadly in want of aid and comfort. A visit to Deaswold Rectory till you are more disposed to view her conduct with indulgence, would afford a satisfactory alternative for all parties."

"Where she pleases, and as soon as she pleases!—I care not if I never see her face again!"—said the angry man. And when Mr. Mordaunt, after a salutation that included all

present in its courtesy, hastened out of the room, poor Magdalen followed him, unnoticed by those who instantly gathered into a group to discuss the astounding revelations of the last hour, to falter out a few words of grateful acknowledgment.

“The devotion of my whole life will be insufficient to repay such generous kindness!” was her murmured farewell.

“In an hour, my dear child, my carriage shall be here to convey you to the Rectory”—were the parting words of her new father.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The multitude of angels with a shout
(Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices) uttering joy, Heaven rung
With jubilee, and loud hosannas filled
The eternal regions.

MILTON.

The unexpected arrival of Magdalen at the Rectory,—an explanation of the origin of which was not immediately necessary,—was naturally ascribed by her uncle and cousin to her desire of affording comfort in the house of sickness.

“This is *your* doing, dear, good Mr. Mor-daunt !” cried Emma, on seeing her step out of the Deasmarsh carriage ; while the invalid, discerning in her presence by his bedside proofs of relenting on the part of the Squire, trusted that, since his brother’s interdiction of all communication between the girls was taken off, the rest would soon follow. At no

great distance of time, the Squire would doubtless make his appearance at the Rectory, to attest the complete vindication of his innocent niece.

The moment this notion took possession of his mind, his convalescence outstripped even the sanguine prognostications of his doctor. A less warm-hearted man than Jacob might, in fact, have been gratified by the interest his illness had excited among his neighbours; and when he saw the whole Mordaunt family collected round him, and his own little smiling girl was the first to point out to him that her cousin was hanging upon Reresby's arm, and to ask whether he would not contrive to get well very soon, that *he* might perform the marriage ceremony for them instead of Mr. Milnward, he felt satisfied, from the light in her laughing eyes, that he had completely misconceived her sentiments, and that his uneasiness on her account had been gratuitous.

It was something, to be sure, to have had his error shared by a woman so skilled in the tactics of her sex, as the widow of the late

celebrated Sir Nicholas Barton ! But when his daughter proceeded to assure him that in London she had been Reresby's confidant, admitted into the secret of his love for Magdalen when even his own sister was untrusted, he could not help wondering how he had ever fancied anything so preposterous as that Emma — his own Emma — could have given away her heart without *his* previous sanction of her choice !—

On recovering sufficiently to find his way down stairs again, and feast his eyes once, through the lattice of jessamines and musk-roses, upon his fragrant lawn, where he found the Deasmarsh party increased by the arrival of Sir Herbert Glynne, and noticed that, whenever family matters were discussed among the elders of the party, the young baronet and Matilda found it pleasanter to instal themselves out of doors, in the rustic seat under his favourite plane-tree, where they were only slightly discernible from the house, he *did* perhaps think it a little strange that his own little linnet should remain the only mateless bird !—But how fortunate for *him* !—Had

Emma taken to flight among the other couples, what would have become of his deserted nest!—

After the lapse of a few days, indeed, it became necessary for Reresby to return to town for the discharge of his parliamentary duties; the struggle of parties being just then of so much too vigorous a nature to admit of the good cause being fought by proxy, that, both in town and country, the honourable member for Castle Dangan was forced to submit to be *unpaired*.

No time was lost in the interval of his absence, however, in forwarding his marriage. And when Ghrimes, of Northampton, waited upon Mr. Cromer with a sketch of the marriage settlements which were to assign to his portionless daughter a jointure of four thousand a-year, the sharp-eared solicitor managed to extract from the ejaculations of the irritable man intelligence promising to his employers all that was wanting to complete their satisfaction.

The vexation of mind arising from the repeal of the Corn Laws, aggravated by the annoyance of seeing Mordecai the Jew not

only sitting in the king's gate, but sitting there after having nobly redeemed his own two worthless sons from the utmost rigour of the law, had determined the surly owner of Cromer Hall to quit the country!—

“Between ourselves, Mr. Ghymes,” said the duck-legged attorney, sidling in a conciliatory manner up to his grander *confrère*, on finding that it was become a more lucrative line of policy to promote peace than foment discord between the parties—“Deasmill ’as become a sad eyesore to the Cromers!—The young Squire, as you probably know, ’as compromised with his father for a ’andsome allowance, and is off to America after the ’akewills;—fearing, I suspect, that, in spite of your employer’s noble exertions, the child-murder business might again be brought forward at some future time, by persons ’ostilely disposed.”—

“He is right.—As long as any of those implicated remain on the spot, they must always be in jeopardy,” replied Ghymes.

“And as regards the Squire,” added Vickers, depressing the corners of his mouth,

"'is 'ealth and 'appiness being completely broke up, he 'as taken a sort of 'atred to the neighb'r'ood."—

"And no wonder!"—rejoined the Northampton solicitor—aware that he could not better serve his patron than by encouraging the distaste. "To such an extent, that he was saying to me yesterday," added Vickers, "that if he could only get a satisfactory tenant for the 'all, he'd let the place at once,—and go and settle at Bath; a place to which he took a great fancy when the young ladies was dying at Clifton!"—

A satisfactory tenant was not long in finding; nay, was already found. The only objection raised by Mordaunt to his daughter's marriage with Sir Herbert Glynne, was the dread of her settling in one of the most disturbed districts of Ireland; and the occasion that now presented itself for the Man of Capital to establish her within reach of her family, was too tempting not to be instantly closed with.

Before Stephen Cromer quitted the country, he joined with his father in signing a lease

for twenty-one years, of the staring old mansion and a hundred and fifty acres adjoining ; —which accommodated the Squire and his lady with the power of removing their spider-legged old chairs and tables, as well as their frightful old family pictures, and a van-load of pickles and preserves, to the house in Marlborough Buildings, where they were to wrangle with each other over their weekly bills and the misconduct of their family, for the peevish remnant of their days.—

One of the most gratifying moments of Mordaunt's life was that when, on taking possession of the premises, he gave *carte-blanche* to his daughter for the complete re-furnishing of the house.—

“ I need not tell you, Matty,” said he, “ to make the Hall as little like as may be to what it was in other times. — Your own good taste would have suggested *that*, even if I had not been anxious that Magdalen should forget she had ever any home in these parts but Deasmarsh. But let nothing remind either ourselves or any one else, of the Cromers. God knows I left nothing undone to pro-

pitiate the unfortunate family we seem to have driven from their own hearthstone!—I submitted to things from *them*, and would have submitted further, such as I would have borne from no other living soul; and all, from the desire of peace and quietness! But the good neighbourship becoming to Christians, had no charm for them.—They were incapable of feeling that all men are brethren. They would not yield to the progress of the times, or enter into the equalizing spirit of modern enlightenment. —And they have consequently done wisely to hide themselves in a crowd; where people may cherish their weaknesses and enjoy their egotism, with less molestation. Henceforward, may this parish become as one family—one happy social knot!—We shall be able to effect twice as much for the good of our poorer neighbours, by acting in concert;—whereas, so long as John Cromer was on the spot, expend what sums of money I might for the benefit of the population, I was sure to find tares springing up among the wheat I was sowing.”

If Matilda replied to this address as though

she had not been listening *very* attentively, there was some excuse for her. She was planning in her own mind how the “parlour” they were standing in could be converted into a dining-room; so as to admit of her morning room being made to open into the study about to be converted into the library of Sir Herbert Glynne!—

The only member of the happy circle on whose brow a tinge of sadness still lingered, was Magdalen;—Magdalen who, with every desire to preserve a dutiful reverence towards her parents, could not but perceive that they were quitting the country in which they had so long abided, without leaving a regret behind!—

But in the eyes of her new kindred, the pensive gravity of her countenance served only to enhance its charm. Till now, they had only seen her at church, or in the fields, muffled in her bonnet and cloak;—and the distinguished grace of her finely-turned head and beautiful form so completely surprised them, that even the sober-minded cotton-spinner was soon heard echoing the declara-

tion of his son that she was the loveliest creature upon earth!—Under any circumstances, the Mordaunts must have found her pretty and pleasing. But the forlorn helplessness of her situation, and the melancholy which their utmost endeavours failed to disperse, rendered her so interesting a hostage in their hands, that they scarcely knew how to make enough of her.—The father, mother, and sister of Reresby, vied with each other in exertions to make her forget that for his sake she had become an orphan.

She, who had lived as a paria in the home of her childhood, suddenly found herself an object of worship. From the heads of the family down to Don and Donna, every living thing at Deasmarsh was at her feet!—

“You will bear in mind, my dear, that I have *two* daughters going to be married!”—was Mordaunt’s generous instruction to his wife, when the wedding clothes were to be ordered;—“whatever may be wanted for Matty, is wanted for Madge.”—

“It is lucky for *me*, perhaps,” said the gentle girl to her cousin, one evening when a

dinner engagement of the Deasmarsh family at Settringham Abbey left them alone at the Rectory, — “lucky for *me*, perhaps, dear Emma, that I have the drawback of Reresby’s absence and my father and mother’s cruel estrangement, to prevent my poor head being completely turned!—Such kindness, — such consideration,—nay, such real affection!—How am I ever to repay these dear friends the indulgence they have shown?”—

Emma, indeed, thought they must be *almost* repaid by the delight taken by the grateful Magdalen in all and every thing at Deasmarsh: a spot which, to her cramped experience of the pleasures of modern luxury, was fairy land.—Such multitudes of new books to read, — of new flowers to wonder at, — of new comforts to enjoy, — seemed to her humble heart an almost too lavish adornment of a world of probation.—

The good Rector, meanwhile, was nearly as much pleased at witnessing the generous joy with which Emma entered into the brilliant prospects of her cousin, as though they awaited herself.—He was doing his best to

get well, that he might officiate in the double solemnization which, immediately on the close of the session, was to drive the parish of Deaswold out of its senses.—For Mordaunt was to bestow marriage portions and new-built cottages on six young girls to be united with six of the most deserving labourers on his estate ;—and the festivities about to celebrate the wedding of his heir, — the heir of his well-earned fortune, — were planned upon a scale likely to make the good old county shake its sides for glee.

The party assembled for the celebration was not to be a brilliant one ;—lest the absence of Magdalen's parents should provoke painful observations.—But it was to be a *merry* one.—The tenants were to be feasted. The poor were to be fed. It was to be an event on which the parish of Deaswold was likely to dwell with gratitude for years and years to come.—

Considering the frightful oath by which Squire Cromer had bound himself never again to cross the threshold of the Rectory, poor Jacob could not much regret his self-banish-

ment from a spot where, as brothers, their unchristian alienation afforded so pernicious an example; more especially, after learning in sad confidence from Mordaunt what it was necessary should be explained to him,—the criminality of the future representatives of the family. But he heard the mortifying tale, and beheld the departure of the Squire and his wife, with a spirit humbled to the dust. In the opinion of Dr. Palliser, the emotions excited by these family events afforded the only obstacle to his immediate recovery.

Emma, however, with her loving eyes and consolatory spirit, was always at hand, to place before her father (as *he* had placed before herself in former moments of despondency) the blessings which so far exceeded the troubles of his lot,—the affection and respect that waited upon him,—and the means of usefulness placed in his hands.

As she sat beside his easy chair, reading or talking to him, or making his tea, while the sweetness of the summer evening breathed pleasantly from his garden into the cozy room, it was impossible indeed not to agree

with her that he had much to be thankful for. At least so thought young Milnward, who was established at the Rectory, fulfilling the duties of an active curate; his gentlemanly manners and active zeal having already so recommended him to the Deasmarsh circle, that Mordaunt, the fountain-head of good suggestions, could not forbear inquiring through Ghrimes of the duck-legged attorney, whether the Squire was to be tempted (the conduct at college of his son Robert having disqualified him for taking orders) to dispose of the next presentation of the family living.

It would not be *quite* impossible, he thought, to perfect the happiness of the Rectory, by permanently attaching to its fire-side the good spirit of the house; in the first instance, as the happy bride of her father's curate, and eventually, as the wife of his successor.

"The sole obstacle I perceive to the match, my dear little coz," whispered Reresby, who already assumed a kinsman's privilege with his kind friend and flame of former days,—
" (for I will not think so ill of you as to fancy

you can long persist in indifference towards a good-looking, good-hearted, right-minded young fellow like Milnward, who loves you like the light of his eyes)—the sole obstacle I perceive is, that you would never prevail upon the widow of the ‘late celebrated’ to honour the ceremony with her presence!—Her little ladyship made so many apologies to me for being sister-in-law to a rectory, that she would die outright on finding herself aunt to a curacy; and one cannot afford to part with so rich a treat!”—

At this suggestion, Emma primmed up her pretty mouth; but whether resenting the attack on Lady Barton, or the hint that Edward Milnward might become in time as acceptable to the daughter as the father, remains to be proved.—

“Let them alone, my dear fellow, let the loving couple alone!” cried Sir Herbert to his brother-in-law. “Canaries never finish their nests, if people watch them while building! You a terrible mar-match, Reresby! If you had not made poor Lady Bel. and Dick Lovell the talk of the town, by pointing

out their courtship to Cad Rowlandson, who had nothing better to do than carry the report in the course of the morning to seven clubs and nine morning visits, besides entertaining a dinner-party at Lady Madrepore's curiosity shop,—it might have come to a marriage at last; when we might have enjoyed the fun of seeing Mark Trevor amplify himself into a double-bodied shadow, like the frog in the fable."

"Or like a two-volumed back-gammon-board in one piece!"—

"Whereas, having been congratulated into breaking off the flirtation, the fair countess is talking of wintering in Athens; the only capital in Europe where she has not yet made herself talked of, and *très bien porté* just now, for ladies addicted to Aspasia-ism."—

"Don't attribute her Philhellenies to *me*!" cried Reresby. "The *real* motive of her dismissing Lord Richard was her disgust at finding what *very* domestic life was the fashion of the day!—Somebody assured Lady Bel. that the Fauconbergs had been seen in the Isle of Wight, honeymooning in a fly and

pair; and she refused Lovell, before the day was over!"—

"No matter!—Practise on her fanciful ladyship whatever hoaxes you think proper; but Emma is too good a creature to be trifled with!"—

In spite, however, of this prohibition, no sooner had the solemnization of the sacred rite, to which all parties had been looking forward with such interest, produced a Mrs. Mordaunt the more in the world, in place of the Miss Mordaunt who ceased to exist, than Reresby contrived to whisper to his father that, during the bridal tour of his children, he must do his utmost to forward the wooing at the Rectory.—

"Our friend Jacob is quite well now, my dear father," said he; "(you heard how finely he read the service this morning?) so that he can afford to part with Milnward for a time; and I have set my heart on another couple following us to the Lakes, before the leaves are off the trees. This commission of mine will give you an excuse for frequent visits to the Rectory, where you are always

so welcome: and serve to keep your hand in for Tom, whose wedding, I suspect, will take place before the year is over.”—

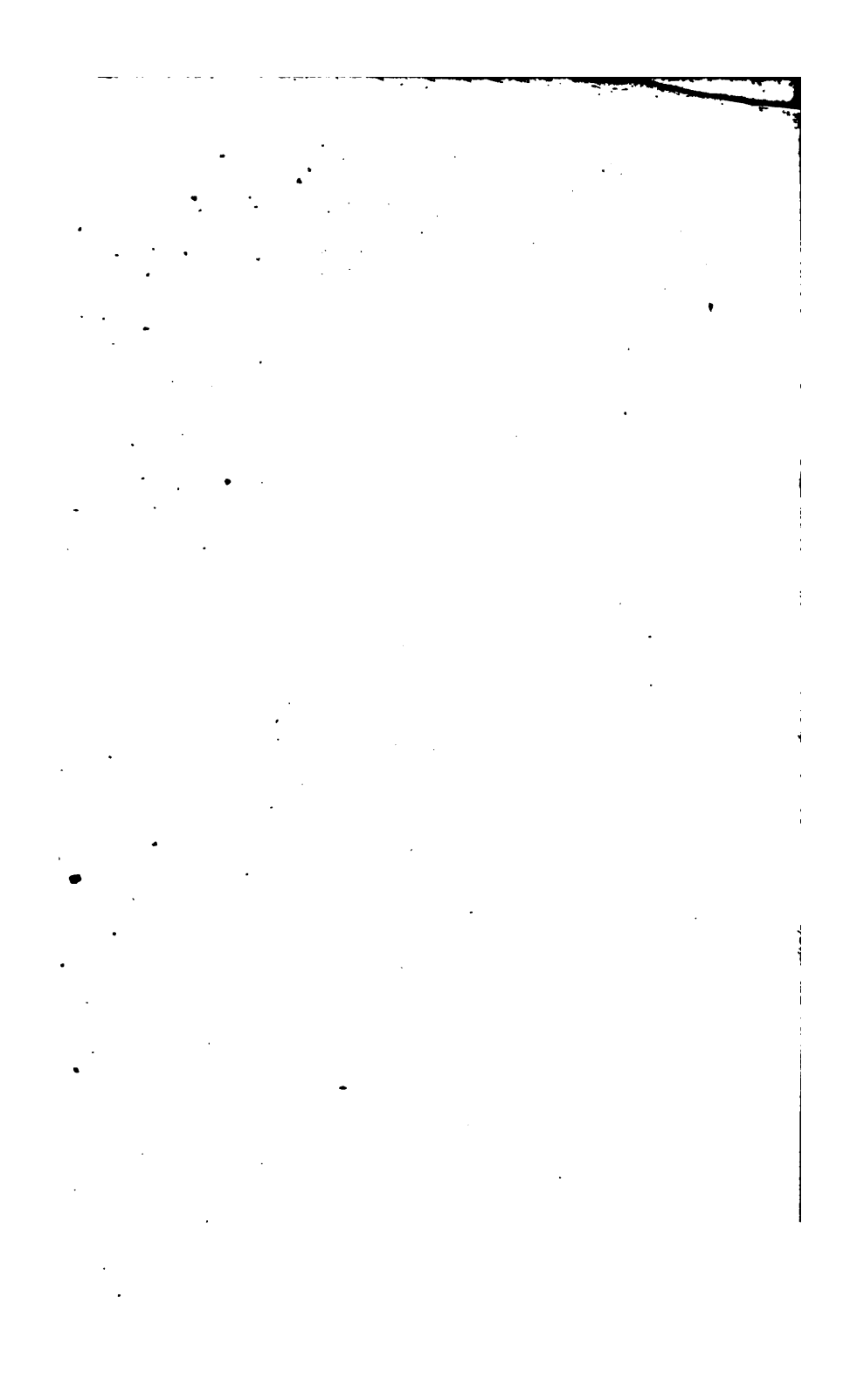
But Mordaunt's heart was too full to answer. Two carriages and four, adorned with favours, were waiting to convey the two happy couples to the railroad; and besides the emotion arising from bestowing his parting benediction on Matilda and Magdalen, he had just returned arm in arm with his excellent wife from the monster-tent erected on his lawn, where the toast of “Long life and prosperity to the worthy family of Mordaunt!” was being echoed by shouts of applause, such as had never before rent the air in the parish of Deaswold.

The bells rung,—the bonfires blazed,—the cottages were adorned with garlands of flowers, and the village was planted on either side the way with rows of young fir-trees from the plantations. From the Darley Station, where the flag was flying as for a royal birthday, pealed a battery erected by the zeal of those connected with the railway; while Clemson and his wife stood bowing and bob-

bing in wedding garments provided by the generosity of the heir of Deaswold; whose happy marriage they evidently regarded as, in a great measure, their handiwork.—

When, in process of time, the formal account of the solemnity of the day, contained in the “Northampton Independent,” was confirmed at Basinghill by the testimony of Farmer Richards and half a dozen other worthies, who had witnessed the roasting of the oxen and distribution of the strong beer, the Miss Mulseys and his Excellency Aristobulus were forced to admit that, if neither lords nor ladies graced the ceremony, neither the lord lieutenant nor the county members, nor their neighbours from Settringham Abbey, nor even Sir John and Lady Mary double G., the poor had ample cause to remember the day; and bless the enlightened mind and beneficent spirit of the second providence of Deaswold,—the self-created gentleman and MAN OF CAPITAL.—

THE END.

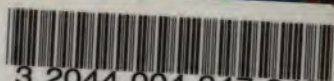


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